# **Chapter 1** Before the beginning

On Deanscales Road in the Norris Green area of Liverpool, a young man, Charles Edward Yearsley, Charlie to his friends, lived in a grim, grey, pebble-dashed, council house, along with his parents, brother and three sisters. On leaving school he joined the railway as a messenger boy *(runner)*.

Breaking his employment with the railway only briefly, in order to set up an ill-fated fish and chip shop in partnership with his brother Ernie, he went on to become a Goods Porter. In this role he was liable to be posted away from home for periods of time.

British Railways, in common with all other publicly owned companies and the Civil Service in general, was run to a certain extent like the fighting services. And so, it was that he found himself, for some time, in Morecambe and then Manchester, where he was based at Liverpool Road goods depot. The worlds first ever railway station, and now the Manchester Museum of Science and Industry (MOSI).

With the advent of the Second World War, along with many young men, Charlie volunteered for the Army. He was turned down on medical grounds. In turn he went on to attempt to join both the Navy and Air Force, each time with the same result. He was devastated, and joined the only *force* that would accept him, The Local Defence Volunteers, otherwise known as the Home Guard. ‘Dad’s Army.’ My dad’s army!

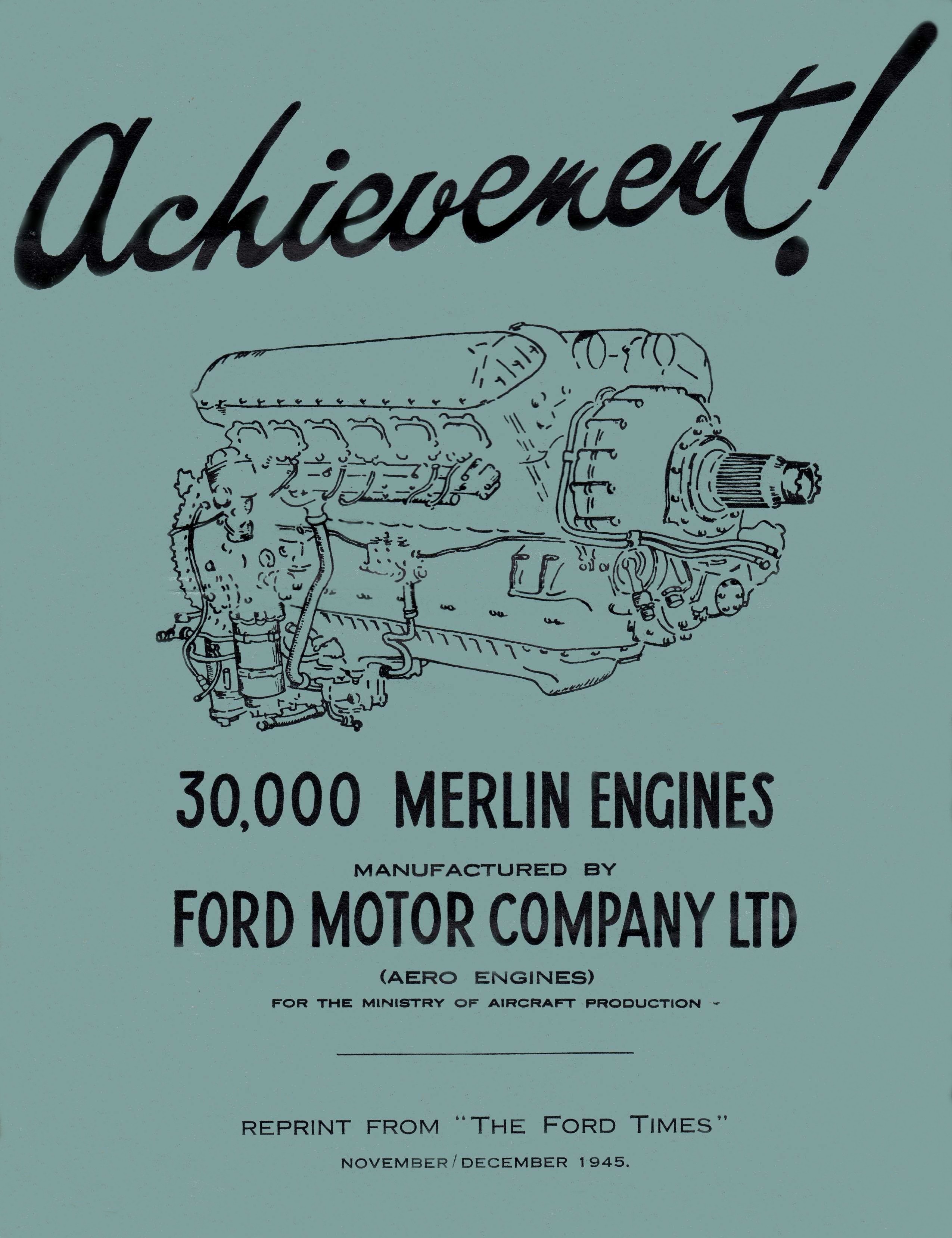
Yes, the Home Guard *was,* as depicted on T.V., composed of an odd collection of people, who for one reason or another couldn’t or wouldn’t join the regular services. For the most part however, they were sincere in wanting to serve their country in any way that they could and despite the second hand uniforms and out dated equipment, they really would have been the last line of defence had the invasion of Britain succeeded. A sobering thought.



As well as being part of the crew of an elderly field gun, (He’s the guy on the right) Charlie took a course in Bomb Disposal. Training which thankfully was never put to the test.

Having done as much as possible in the military sense, and still anxious to ‘do his bit’, Charlie then made every effort to get into essential war work. Success! He was sent to report to Henry Ford’s new factory, in Trafford Park, Manchester.

This plant was not the old home of the British version of the famous Model T, and later Model A Fords, but a brand new factory, set up by order of the government. The military needed far more aero engines than were currently being produced, so the government turned to Henry Ford, inventor of mass production. Two brand new plants, A and B, were built on land requisitioned from the Manchester Ship Canal Company, either end of, what is now, Barton Dock Road. The Ford Motor Company (Aero Engines) Ltd. Was in business, and Charlie, along with hundreds of other inexperienced workers, was given a crash course. His was in welding, and he did so well that he was made a foreman, in charge of the Valve Line. Making inlet and exhaust valves for the Rolls Royce Merlin engines, which the factories were required to produce in large quantities. These went not only into the fighter and bomber aircraft, which most people know about, but many tanks and self propelled artillery too.



*After WWII, the land and factories were returned to the original owners and leased to the Massey Ferguson, farm equipment company. Today most of it is occupied by two huge retail developments.*

Now, the valves on most engines, then as now, were machined from a single casting or forging. This did not meet Rolls Royce’s exacting standards however, and their design specified the valves be made initially hollow. This hollow was then painstakingly filled with a continuous spiral of weld metal. The machined result was deemed to be superior, in strength and resistance to distortion, than those produced by the more traditional methods, and hence far more reliable. The cost, however, in both time and labour was many times higher.

Both, because of the lack of manpower and to keep down the costs, this work was carried out by long lines of overall clad young ladies, hair in headscarf turbans, sitting at bench vices, each with their own welding sets beside them, and all in the charge of Charlie Yearsley.

One of these lovely young women a certain Audrey Pegg, ‘Peggy’ to her friends, became a favourite of Charlie. They became romantically involved and before long, engaged to be married.

Peggy lived with her parents, William and Louisa, her three brothers, Clifford (Cliff.), Victor (Vic.), and Eric, plus her sister Clarice, in a large four bedroom, council house. 194 Lloyd St. South stands at the outer end of one of Manchester’s lesser arterial roads, not far from the site of the old Maine Road football stadium. At that time, the wide roadway was cobbled and had twin tram tracks down its centre. The trams themselves, however, had long ceased to run.

*Francis* William Pegg was a businessman, with his own company, ‘Hill and Godbert’. The business was bombed out, the offices and contents being almost totally destroyed. All that remained was Will’s large, expensive desk; matching high backed chair and a vast supply of unused stationery, wrapped in brown paper parcels, tied with string. These were all stored for ‘the duration’, in the front parlour at 194.

William thus went, almost overnight, from being his own boss to having to go out and get a job, clerking for the CWS Tobacco factory. This he did, without batting an eyelid, in order to continue supporting his family.

William was also a religious man and held office at a local church. Platt Lane Methodist Church, known then as ‘Platt Chapel’, so as to stop confusion with ‘Platt Church’, the local Anglican Parish Church, Holy Trinity, further down Platt Lane.

Platt Chapel could have been the model for St. Bartholomew’s, Church, Westhoughton. The octagonal nave with attached hall, offices etc. differed only in size and materials. Also, it stands in a small tarmac car park, rather than a large churchyard. Methodist churches do tend to develop in this rather practical, unplanned manner.

Back at 194 Lloyd St. South, the boys were leaving. Two got married and set up homes of their own, and Vic was away in the Air Force. And so it was that there was plenty of room for an extra body, when Peggy and Charlie decided to get married and set up home there, on June 19th 1943.

William Pegg *was* slightly upset that Peggy and Charlie had decided not to get married at ‘the chapel’, nor at the local Anglican Church, St. Crispin’s. But a good mile away at Holy Trinity, Platt. (Platt Church) Why?

I was never told, but I suspect it was simply because Platt Chapel was as already described, St. Crispin’s was a very utilitarian building resembling a flat roofed, brick blockhouse, and Platt Church, by comparison, is a traditional Neo Gothic building, with spire, lychgate and nicely kept churchyard. In other words, it would look better in the photographs. It did!



St. Crispin’s, incidentally, was, in more recent times, given a conventionally tiled, pitched roof, in order to keep out the rain. Since when, it has been knocked down for housing. Platt Chapel too has been partly demolished for housing. The octagonal nave, alone, still stands, divided by a mezzanine floor.

The upper floor now serves as worship space, the ground floor a new hall, meeting rooms and offices, to replace those demolished.

Temporarily it also housed the congregation from St. Crispin’s. Both denominations under the one roof, until St. Crispin’s Rectory was extended to serve as a new church.

Sadly, as I write, the vacated land around the Methodist Church has not attracted any buyers. To date, all that loss and disruption has been a complete waste of time, effort, money and fine facilities.

The war came to an end in 1945 and with it, for Charlie, so did the war work and also the Home Guard. However, the government, realising how handy it might be to have a pool of ready trained soldiers in case of any further conflict, especially if they didn’t have to pay them in the meantime, decided to keep it going.

They gave it lots of slightly used modern uniforms and equipment, and incorporated it into ‘The Territorial Army’.

Yes, ‘Dad’s Army’ became the TA!

Charlie went back to The Railways and Audrey got a job with the CO-OP, in the cash office at their main store on Downing Street, Ardwick. Being an employee / member of the society, she was entitled to choose her own membership number with which to collect her *Divvy.* She chose the easily remembered 567.

**Chapter 2** The Foundations of Labour

A couple of blocks walk around the corner from 194 Lloyd St. South brings you to Manchester’s main south arterial road.

Princess Road leads from the edge of the city centre and runs all the way out to Wythenshawe. Back in 1946, that’s as far as it went. The broad dual carriageway with its tram tracks down the middle just petered out into farmland, as did the ribbon development housing on each side. Now, of course, it continues, as Princess Parkway, on to Woodhouse Park and then becomes the M56 motorway which, joining the M6 at Warrington, directly connects Manchester city-centre with the entire country, via the motorway network. But that’s enough geography.

The short walk from 194 to Princess Road, brings you to a small row of once prosperous shops known as ‘The Parade’, directly opposite Whalley Range girls high school. At the right hand end of this row of shops, now stands a swish, modern BP petrol station. ‘The Cresta Court’.

This filling station, formally a Mobil, was named after one of the many local cinemas, on whose site it now stands. The original station, which the present one replaces, was actually created in a very economical manner. The cinema building was cut in two, literally, with a wrecking ball. The wreckage of the front two thirds being simply bulldozed, as hardcore, down into the stalls and on up to the stage, complete with it’s screen, which you could still see, at the time, hanging in tatters within the remains of the proscenium arch. After siting the big fuel storage tanks, the hardcore was then topped off with concrete; so as to form both the forecourt and the floor of the building in one go.

What was left of the Cresta cinema, or Regent as it had originally been built, was then given a huge corrugated metal façade, bearing the once proud Mobil flying horse logo, thus completely disguising its origins. All of this I watched, over a period of a very few days, from the top decks of corporation busses, with a great deal of mixed emotion.

Why the emotion, mixed or otherwise? Well, like most small boys I was fascinated with watching dynamic change of any kind. I still am. The rest of the reason lies back in time.

On the evening of Sunday, 18th of August, 1946, during the late feature, in the front stalls of the Regent Cinema, Audrey ‘*Peggy’* Yearsley went into labour. Yes, *I* had begun my journey into the outside world, to see what the hell all the fuss was about!

A short journey by ambulance, along Princess Road, took Charlie and Peggy to the Maternity department of Withington Hospital, where I made my first appearance early the next morning. Look out world, Stuart Charles Yearsley had arrived. They never did get to see the end of that film.

Occasionally, I have reason call at the ‘Cresta Court’ to fill up with fuel. The new station is built ninety degrees out of rotation to the original, though still on the same ground plan. This means that it is now possible to stand, several feet above those front stalls, where they still sit, as part of the hardcore of the foundations. Spooky!

The original Withington Hospital too, has since been demolished. Some departments remain, on the opposite side of Nell Lane, but It seems that, piece by piece, as I move along life’s treadmill, the evidence of my passing through is being systematically removed, behind me.

# **Chapter 3** The Range, the Gramophone & the Plug

Life was wonderful at 194. I was spoiled rotten, not only by my parents and grandparents but also by my Uncle Vic. and Auntie Clarice, who quickly became known, as my second parents. As I first learned to talk, I could manage ‘Uncle Vic’ OK, but Clarice was beyond me. Instead, I called her ‘Auntie Caboo.’, and in return she referred to me as her ’Choo Choo Charlie. Nick-names which endured, for use in lighter moments over the years, until the last time we set eyes on one another.

The house had plenty of room, but I now know that the way in which this room was used, or rather misused, not only by my family but most of the neighbours in their homes too, revealed much about the servant origins to their working class backgrounds.

The large front room, which the architect had clearly intended to be the principal living space, was not used at all. Called ‘The Parlour,’ it had, until the loss of my Granddad’s business, been kept spic and span. Since then, as I’ve already described, it contained a large desk and chair plus many packs of pre-printed stationery. When my father-to-be moved in, this situation got worse.

Until the day we moved out, over five years later, my parents bought furniture, bit by bit, and stacked it in The Parlour, leaving very little room.

Pride of place went to a large wind-up gramophone, a ‘Gilbert Model 85, in mahogany’. More about this later. Eventually, this space would become, unofficially, my playroom, what with that big desk to sit at and all that paper to draw upon.

Since they did not live in the, purpose designed, living room, they instead lived in what was clearly intended to be the house’s kitchen. This room, with its large inset, black leaded range, was always *referred* to as The Living Room.

Though the range was always lit, and it sported twin hobs, four hotplates two ovens and a massive polished brass fender, it was never used for anything other than heating the room and airing clothes.

These were hung to dry, when raining, from a long, Victorian drying rack, suspended over the hearthrug, and then finished off in the ovens.

Also in the room was an overstuffed three-piece suite, and an extending dining table, along with its four chairs, sat under the big window which looked out onto the back garden.

A huge, black, mirror backed sideboard stood against one wall, as did a smallish, tallish, rattan cane table, on which stood our big valve radio. ‘The Wireless’. On a small shelf under the Wireless was a glass, lead-acid battery, from which the wireless was powered. This was changed every week or so by ‘the man’ from Ready Radio, and was always referred to as ‘The Accumulator.’

So, if they ignored the Living Room and preferred to live in The Kitchen, then where did they cook? Why in the ‘Scullery’ of course. This room, which was between the original kitchen and the back door, had originally been built as a Washhouse, the equivalent of a modern day utility room. Now this is where the prevailing attitudes got slightly askew.

Not feeling comfortable about living in the ‘best room’, but living in the kitchen instead, as if they were their own servants, is perhaps historically understandable. But why then would they not want to be seen cooking on ‘the range’? Answer; they simply regarded this as very ‘old fashioned’, and cooked instead on a large, skeletal, cast iron gas stove, in the Scullery.

The oven was like a small safe bolted between four massive legs. The impression I got when I asked about this was, that only the poorest people, who couldn’t afford a gas stove, actually used the range. This, despite the fact that ranges cook beautifully, all the steam goes off up the chimney, and providing the fire is lit, which it always was, they cook for free. Whereas, high up on the scullery wall, not far from the stove, was the ever hungry, coin-slot Gas Meter.

This originally consumed large quantities of big old copper pennies, which were saved for this purpose in a jar and never ran out. Later it was converted to take one shilling pieces instead *(5p.s)*, which being worth twelve times as much, were not saved and hence often did run out. Someone was always being told to ‘pop next door and borrow a shilling for the meter’.

Precisely the same predicament regularly occurred with the ‘Electric Meter’. This was sited close to the gas meter, above the wash boiler, cooker and ‘slop-stone’ earthenware sink where it would be sure to spend most of it’s time covered in damp and condensation. Electricity being rather new, safety precautions were rudimentary, if they existed at all.

I remember many a night, at home, or at someone else’s house, when the last shilling ran out and the house would be plunged into darkness.

Often the forays to try and ‘borrow a shilling from next door’, would prove unsuccessful. Then, out came the candles, which would be balanced on saucers all over the place. Table, mantelpiece, windowsills, the wireless, etc. It was dangerous as hell, but nobody thought so, at the time.

The house did have disused, gas-lamp brackets in every room, which, had they been cleaned up and fitted with mantles and shades would have lighted the house perfectly well. However, the very thought of using the gaslights was looked upon exactly the same as using the cooking range. ‘Unthinkably old fashioned’.

The one thing unaffected by the ‘shilling running out’, was of course the wireless, with its accumulator. The glow from the dial, augmenting the candles in lighting the room. That of course came to an end, ‘The day we had The Plug put in’.

Up until this time, although the house had full electric lighting, there wasn’t a single power socket in the entire place. All the electric appliances, iron, hairdryer, table lamps, etc., even a very dodgy looking electric fire, were plugged into the light sockets. There wasn’t even any need to take out the bulbs. Most of the pendant light fittings had plugged into them ‘Y’ shaped two way adapters, made specifically for this purpose. One arm of the ‘Y’ came straight downwards. This then accepted the bulb. It even had its own switch, push button or pull cord, so that the other leg of the Y, the ‘power outlet’, could be used during the day, with the light switched off.

None of the appliances, so used, were earthed, of course, and the current loading on the lighting wiring must have been frightening, but there never was any problem. Even with today’s improvements in wiring, this is now a totally illegal practice.

One day, ‘The Electrician’ came, and fitted ‘The Plug’.

No ring main or separate fused circuits, of course. What he actually did was, take a floorboard up in the bedroom above the kitchen/living room and connect into the lighting wires.

His new cable went out through an air-brick, down the outside wall and in through a hole, drilled in the corner of the window frame above the dining table. Here, on the windowsill, right up against the frame, open sockets pointing upwards so as to catch all the condensation and dust, was sited a small, round, unprotected, two pin, 2 amp. socket, ‘The Plug’.

Using ‘The Plug’ was in some ways even less safe than using the light sockets; there was no safety improvement at all. But, a small modification to the wireless, involving a length of brown, cotton covered, twisted flex, later, and we bade goodbye to the accumulator.

So now, when ‘the shilling ran out’, and all the lights went off, so too did the wireless.

Progress!

Oh! By the way. I’ve Just realised that I’ve told a fib. That big, beautiful Range *was* used for cooking, just one thing.

Some nights we would sit around the fire, and using a long, twisted wire fork, toast thick doorsteps of hand sliced bread in front of the glowing coals. These were then sat to keep warm on the swing-out hobs, before being drenched in best butter and eaten. Luxury!

# **Chapter 4** Singing Counterpoint

Most of my early time at 194 I spent, unsurprisingly, in my pram. A big, cream and black lacquered, coachbuilt ‘Silver Cross’, with leather hung suspension and a fully fitted and lined out hood. Back then Coachbuilt really meant, built like a coach. It was just like a small landau. It even had hand painted coachlines.

Now, there are those who insist that I can’t possibly remember being in my pram. ‘Babies memories don’t begin to function that early’, they say. What I am about to recount, ‘*must* be my imagination’. I however, know different.

My Nana Pegg insisted that babies needed plenty of fresh air. So as well as being ‘pushed out’, to the shops or the park, my pram was regularly put in the small porch, outside the back door, handle pointing out towards the back garden. I was effectively outdoors but protected from sun, wind and rain by the porch.

I clearly remember the inside of the hood, with its Romanesque keystone pattern on the broad band of elastic, stitched around the edge. A large-mesh anti-cat net was always fitted when I was left unattended, to keep out our cat, Tiddles.

The top of the porch entrance was formed by a brick arch, it probably still is, and I remember gazing up at this arch, which had above it’s inside, a shelf, running across the full width. On this shelf was a row of jars. Years later I found out what these screw top jars contained. My Auntie Clarice’s collection, of *spiders*!

During my first four years, life seemed to revolve around me. Whatever was going on, I was always included, never sidelined. Whilst my Mam and Dad were at work, I was mainly in the charge of my Nana Pegg.

She took me ‘down the lane’ *Platt Lane shops*, every day. No fridges then, remember, and once a week to ‘The Stores’. One of the local Co-ops, of which there were three. I got to know those shops, the assistants and even the regular customers, very well.

Now, I used to be very shy. Er- *NOT*!

In certain of those shops I would be stood on the counter to entertain the people, *by singing Joseph Locke songs*. This would always be rewarded with a small treat. Some crayons or a colouring book in the toyshop. A biscuit or two from the big square, open tins in Seymour Mead’s. You get the picture? But without a doubt the best gig was Dunkerly’s Bakery and Delicatessen. There I had a choice of three things. A small cake, a few ounces of potted beef, cut from a shallow, flat, metal tray and wrapped in greased proof paper, or, if I was lucky, a Mini Hovis loaf. Yowser!



T. Seymour Mead’s and Byng’s toyshop are long, long gone. Dunkerley’s however remains, at time of writing. Now boarded up and derelict. The shopfront, complete with nameboard, is still there when I pass, to remind me of those heady days, when at three years old I could hold an audience in the palm of my hand, *and get paid for it.*

# **Chapter 5** Disaster on Two Legs

On the minus side, things weren’t all fun for me around that time. 1950 was my year for being distinctly accident-prone.

One day, early in the year, and running around in play, I tripped over my father’s outstretched legs, as he slept in an armchair. I fell towards the fireplace and ended up with that big brass fender in my mouth. I was rushed to the nearby Manchester University Dental Hospital with a good many of my upper milk teeth folded back and a huge gum abscess.

Until my second teeth came through, I was to spend my early schooldays being called ‘gummy’ and looking like a junior vampire. I can smell the chloroform to this day and I carry much more tangible reminders still, but things didn’t stop there!

Many of my parent’s friends, dated from their war years spent at Ford’s. My Mothers best friend was one such bench side colleague, Elsie Slack. Around the time Mam and Dad got together, Elsie met and eventually married Fred Cooke. They became a close foursome. The Cookes had a daughter, Elaine, around the same time I was born. We all became unofficial relatives, aunts, uncles and cousins. We visited them often, and in 1950 it was decided that we should all go on holiday together. The venue was Middleton Tower Holiday Camp, just south of Morecambe.

Opened on my birth date, but seven years earlier, Middleton Tower was exactly like the camp portrayed in the ‘Hi de Hi’ TV series, with one notable exception.

The central feature of the complex was a ballroom/ theatre/ cinema block, with shops and bars, etc, built in the style of an ocean liner. ‘The SS Berengaria’.

It really did seem wonderful. This however was going to take a while for me to find out.

We went to Morecambe by bus. At the bus station we were met, along with hundreds of others, by a fleet of very plain, blue, utilitarian looking, Seddon single deckers. Not unlike military busses, with close spaced uncomfortable seats. These were the camp shuttles.

We didn’t mind the discomfort though, it was only for a few minutes and we were excited over the holiday. Well, I was at least. So excited in fact, that when the bus pulled up on the camp’s gravel car park, I pushed in front of my mother in an attempt to be the first off.

Now, I was very small and the distance from the bottom step to the ground was beyond my reach, especially as there was no curb. Before my mother could stop me, I found myself doing a nosedive towards the gravel. Crunch!

My first memory of Middleton Towers was the inside of the first aid room, with a fresh, folded hanky pressed against my bleeding forehead. I spent that holiday sporting a large prominent sticking plaster, but enjoyed myself from then on, nonetheless. Except that is for one other incident.

One day, when the Yearsleys and the Cookes were going their own ways, my parents took me along to the camp crèche. A large, single storey prefab, which had windows most of the way round. It had a fenced in play areas outside, filled with nice toys. There were more of the same inside, with lots of happy children playing with them. I hadn’t got a clue as to what was going on.

I was shown the ‘nice toys’ and introduced to the ‘happy children’, then after being told to ‘enjoy myself’ and ‘they’d be back for me in a little while‘, my Mam and Dad went through the door and were gone!

I finally twigged. They were leaving me here and going off without me, to do something which I was to be left out of. - Oh No they weren’t!

I opened my mouth wide, threw back my head - and screamed, just as loud as I could. The ‘minders’ tried to comfort me but I was having none of it. Very quickly they gave in and one of them ran out of the door to fetch my parents back.

Result! They never tried that one again.

We went twice more to Middleton Towers during my childhood, and I carry enduring memories, not of the pain but of the joy I had there. For many years the camp stood empty and derelict, awaiting planning permission, against stiff opposition, to turn it into a prison. It was finally bulldozed and replaced with the UK’s largest retirement village. Only the name remains.

Summer went, as summers always do, and the next notable date on any child’s calendar, then as now, was Bonfire Night. The evening of November 5th 1950 was spent at home. I was deemed old enough to be allowed my own fireworks for the first time, but not to go to a bonfire. When it had gone dark, the living room and kitchen lights were turned out, so as to throw the back garden into darkness, and a large box of fireworks was produced.

We all went outside, onto the path under the living room window. My Dad and Uncle Vic. then proceeded to take fireworks out of the box, one at a time, and sticking them in the middle of the lawn, lit them and retired to the path. After a few of these, a packet of sparklers appeared. Some of the grown ups lit them and proceeded to wave them about for my amusement, accompanied by the usual daft noises…….. I was given one.

Now I didn’t mind watching others waving this ‘fire’ about, but I was none too chuffed at having it thrust into *my* hand… I dropped it… Into the box of fireworks… The open, - cardboard box. The whole lot caught alight, one from another, and we quickly found ourselves watching the remainder of the short, expensive show from the *inside* of the living room window.

The Rip-Raps were best!

Then, along came Christmas, to complete the high spots of the year, and the decorations went up. Balloons, gaily coloured paper garlands, and of course, the Christmas Tree. Many of these had been used over previous years but some, I had been allowed to choose, whilst Christmas Shopping with my Nana, in Manchester city centre.

Fashions in Christmas decorations haven’t changed much over the years, nor the imitation, foldaway Christmas trees. One thing has changed, and with good reason; our tree had real candles on it.

Small, shiny metal, coloured candleholders, mounted on little bulldog clips, were clipped onto the ends of many of the branches. In each one a coloured, wax candle. Just like on the Christmas cards. Unlike the pictures on the cards, however, these candles didn’t stand up straight. Their weight caused them to lean drunkenly, in all directions. Not very pretty. Also unlike on the cards, they were never lit. I asked why.

Following a perfectly reasonable explanation concerning the dangers of lighted candles on trees, I was unconvinced. As I’ve already explained, living regularly with lighted candles dotted around the house, was a fact of life.

I was used to them and didn’t see why there should be any difference because the candles were fixed to a tree. I pestered to have them lit, - and got my way.

Mam made sure that all the candleholders were sited so as not to be under any overhanging branches, and starting at the top she carefully lit them, one by one.

They spat a bit. They smoked a bit. But when they had settled down they looked quite pretty, - quite seasonal, in fact, - for a while. Right up, in fact, to the point where I could contain myself no longer and just had to touch.

The tree went over. Lit candles, baubles, chocolate novelties, tinsel and all. Then, whoosh. The whole lot went up in a ball of flame.

I don’t remember how it was put out, or by whom, but we were remarkably lucky. The tree was destroyed, of course, but there was very little collateral damage. The smell took a while to go, though.

The baubles that were still in one piece were salvaged, as were the candleholders. They cleaned up just fine and were used for many a year afterwards, fitted with new candles. But these were never, ever, lit again.

**Chapter 6** Parallel Parking

Close to home was Platt Fields Park. A ninety acre wonderland. Here, in what remained of the once extensive grounds of Platt Hall were bowling greens, sports fields, tennis courts, lush gardens, three boating lakes, a paddling pool, a circular amphitheatre with a band-stand in the centre, a model steam railway track, and an open air swimming pool.

The hall itself had been converted into a Museum of Costume but, even then, there were signs that the park had seen better days.

The model railway track, supported off the ground on its concrete posts, stood rusty and disused. The shed, which had been the clubhouse of the Model Engineering Society, was locked and abandoned. My Dad once lifted me up, to look through the filthy window, when I asked him to do so. Beyond the cobwebs I saw a scene of devastation, in the midst of which, standing on it’s cab end, leaned a large, model, live steam locomotive which must have taken hundreds of hours of skill, patience and love to build. Even at three years old, I felt sadness at the sight. Happily, next to the railway field stood the clubhouse of the Model Yacht Club.

No rust or neglect here, everything was quite literally ‘shipshape’. Sunday mornings, the beautiful yachts would be lined up on their stands, on the wide veranda, waiting their turn to be raced on the big, model boating lake. I liked the model yachts, and typical of all kids, I suppose, I wanted one.

I already had a small toy sailing boat, of a type still available today. Basically a small, yellow dinghy a few inches long. It had a solid, flat bottomed, carved hull, with a folding mast. It floated well enough in the bath, so down to the park it went.



Next to the *serious,* model boating lake, was a smaller one for the likes of me. The Children’s Boating Lake was shallow, exactly circular, and entirely above ground. That is, it was contained within a low concrete wall over which I could safely lean without any danger of falling in. Tied onto the end of a ball of wool so as not to get out of reach, in went the sailing dinghy. It may have looked OK in the bath, in the lake; however, it capsized with the first ripple. The ball of wool was totally redundant.

For my next birthday, I was bought a bigger sailboat. A proper yacht this time. Red, about fifteen inches long, Bermuda rig, and a steel plate keel. Strangely, it even had my initials, ‘SY’, on the mainsail. I now know that this boat was a smallish member of a complete range, also still available today, which really do, for some reason, all bear my initials. Cool!

Down to the park we went again, into the water went the new boat, still tied onto a ball of wool. The wind blew, and – it fell over. I had no idea, how to rig a yacht or set a sail, neither did my Dad.

Whatever we tried the result was the same. The boat just lay sadly on its side with the sails soaking wet. So home it went, to be put away till another day, when I, hopefully, *would* know how to sail it.

Today, the model boating lakes are both gone, as is the paddling pool, railway track and amphitheatre. The swimming pool remained for many years though, filled with earth and home to a colony of rabbits, as the centrepiece of ‘Pets Corner’. A children’s zoo. That too is now long gone.

The main lake, however, *is* still there, just as it was. Large, roughly circular, and with a sizeable, wooded island in the centre.

During the summer months, a fleet of, well maintained, rowing boats were taken out of the boathouse and put on the water for hire. Also, most years, ‘the piece de resistance’, a long, sleek, open, motor launch, called ‘Archie Littlemore’, was rolled down the slipway, and into the water. The price of a few pence would buy you two trips around the perimeter of the lake. ‘Twice around the island’. The main lake may still be there, but sadly, The Archie Littlemore, like so much else, is also just a memory.

From watching my Uncle Vic. Playing football and cricket, to taking part in a Co-op ‘Bun Fight’, Platt Fields was to continue playing a part in my young life. Later it was to feature several times more. But that’s for then and this is now.

# **Chapter 7** Friends & Neighbours

As a four-year-old, life at 194 Lloyd St. South just got better, and I got to know all the neighbours. For instance, at 192 there were the Hames’s. They had a car! At 196 there were the Bracegirdles, they had a young daughter, Pauline, about my age. We naturally became good friends. My family knew many of the others in that long row of semis, and it was always open house. One of the neighbours, Fred, had a well equipped, tool-shed, in which he took great pride. I was fascinated to watch him work, so imagine my delight when he offered to let me have a go. After lecturing me on the safety aspects of using tools, he showed me the correct way to hold a screwdriver, saw, chisel, etc. Then actually let me saw a piece of wood, held in the bench-vice. All this, remember, with me only four years old. Also at this age, I was trusted outside the garden gate alone, just once each working day, to wait for my Granddad coming home from work by bus. I was told to stay back against the hedge and never to go near the edge of the curb. I never let them or myself down, but it was a busy main road. How could they be so sure of me? No one today would dare take such a risk.

I got to know the local geography very well. Not only did my Nana and Auntie Clarice walk me all over the place, but I was ridden all over it too; by my Uncle Vic., on the crossbar of his bike. One day, he had volunteered to help a friend deliver an easy chair some distance across the neighbourhood. I happened to be with him, so I went too, seated in the chair, borne high upon their shoulders!

Around this time, my Uncle Vic. became a bus conductor. A few years later he was promoted to driver. As he usually worked on local routes, this made for many free journeys over this period. A considerable saving on the family’s transport costs. Also, when he made the switch from guard to driver, I found myself the owner of a genuine corporation bus guard’s hat, lapel badge, clip board and ticket punch. The most anyone else could aspire to was a toy conductor’s outfit. I had the real thing!

Also, for some reason, probably connected with his being ex RAF, my Uncle Vic. Insisted on making me small, balsa chuck gliders. Similar to the ones you can buy, but somewhat more elaborate, with fancy tails and engines, etc. I never knew what his job was in the RAF, but he certainly had no idea about aerodynamics. Not a one of them ever flew or even attempted to. All they ever did was flutter to earth like a falling leaf. I never complained.

For the rare occasions when I was bored, due to a shortage of companionship, I invented for myself, an invisible friend; Peter Green. He wasn’t a secret, I told everyone about him. They humoured me.

Peter Green was the boy I’d liked to have been. He and his family had everything we did not. Big house, television, car. Get the picture? Even, for some reason, fluorescent lighting!

*(Little could I have guessed, back then, that he would grow up to become an ace guitarist, form Fleetwood Mack, and have a massive hit with Albatross. - joke)*

One other thing I remember not going short of whilst being a resident of Fallowfield; ice cream.

My family, were good friends, for various reasons, with three different, immigrant Italian ice-cream families. The Granellis, the Reas and the Scapatichis. These last through the marriage of one of my mothers ex war-work friends. We visited them all fairly often, but my favourite was old Mama Granelli. The widow of Louis Granelli, the man who had brought Granelli’s Ice cream to Manchester in 1889, still worked at the sharp end.

Despite being in charge of the whole business. She sold her delicious wares from a trailer van parked in the old Manchester Smithfield Market, near Shudehill. This trailer, was towed there every morning by her son Vincent, behind his motor van. Then, every evening, when his rounds were done and the market closed, he picked his mother up and towed the trailer back to the dairy.

Nana Pegg was a personal friend of Mama Granelli. They seemed a similar age, and would ‘chew the fat’ about old times, for half an hour or more. I didn’t mind. I was content just to stand there, and eat the ice-cream.

Although the Scapatichi name vanished as brothers Gerardo and Bernado split the business into Ben’s and Gerald‘s, the vans of Marco and Dom Rea were still in evidence into my youth. The Granelli name however, is not now seen just on small ice cream carts, but on ice cream parlours, huge trucks and in the freezer cabinets of most every supermarket in the land. And *I* knew them, and got the stuff for free. Jammy so‘n’so. Things, however, were about to change. Dramatically.

# **Chapter 8** Oh Brother

One day early in the New Year of 1951, my Mam stopped us walking, just outside our garden gate, as we returned home.

“Stuart,” she said, “your Dad and I have decided that its about time you had a little brother or sister, and” she continued, “we’ve decided that you can choose it’s name, if you’d like to.”

No fool she! My mother had pulled the old ‘Bad news - Good news’ ploy, just in case I wasn’t too overjoyed by the announcement. - It worked!

Well, my friend next door was called Pauline and I liked the name, but not wanting to copy, I immediately suggested “Paula”. “What if it’s not a girl?” I was then asked.

“Well, err, Paul then. Will that be alright?” I asked. –It was!

Although I had been completely unaware of it, both my mother and father had changed their jobs, at least once, during this early period of my life, in order to improve their income.

Realising that there was no future for him on ‘The Railway’, Dad had decided to capitalise upon his wartime experience as a welder. As such he entered the engineering industry and was obviously good enough to impress prospective employers. He took advanced skill courses, whenever required to, and became *very* good at his work. However, because he had no formal qualifications he always undervalued himself and wore the tag ‘semiskilled’ around his neck for the rest of his career, like an albatross.

Mam, apparently, did two things. She moved around in the retail trade, going from the Co-op, to Lewiss’ department store. The most memorable thing I remember being told about this period, was the Christmas when the store Santa fell ill and my mother was asked to substitute, with the aid of much padding and make up.

The other thing she did was to teach herself to type. I don’t know when, why or how, but I do know that she never became fully touch proficient, using only two fingers on her left hand. She nevertheless achieved a decent speed. Also to her regret, she didn’t learn shorthand either.

It was while working as a typist, in the spring of 1951, that she had to give up work to go into Withington Hospital ‘to bring home the new baby’. Prior to this, several related things had happened.

My old carrycot had been got out and cleaned, as had my high chair, nappies and even baby clothes. My Silver Cross pram, however, got the ‘royal’ treatment. We pushed it down to ‘Babyfair’ at All Saints, from whom it had been bought, where it was left, to be fully refurbished. The paintwork was made like new and it was fitted with a new hood and apron.

Why the ‘royal’ treatment? Well I was assured that the Royal Family, despite their wealth, never wasted money by buying a new pram, every time they needed one. They just had the old one rebuilt. I later found this to be absolutely true!

My brother Paul was born on March 23rd. My mother brought him home a few days later, to all the usual fuss from family and friends.

I could tell that a special effort was being made not to exclude me, but I was aware of a distinct shift of attention. Now that the debate about the baby’s sex was over, I was asked to further contribute by choosing a second name. I chose a version of the surname of my favourite radio comedian, Frankie Howerd, so Paul Howard Yearsley he was from then on. Strangely enough, he still is.

Everything was fine, for a while. Too good to last.

One day, I’d been left at home, whilst Mam took Paul for a ‘check up’. When they returned home, there was a definite atmosphere. From the moment they came through the living room door. My Nana said to my Mam, “Well, what did they say luv?” Mam just broke down and the floodgates opened. “They said he’ll have to go into hospital and have an operation”, she sobbed, and collapsed into her mother’s arms, baby and all. It transpired that Paul had been born with a dislocated hip. He would need to have it put back into place, and held there with a plaster cast, for two years. *Two years!*

I had no idea what this would mean, no one did. We soon found out!

When my new baby brother emerged from hospital, all you could see of him were his toes and his head and arms. Everything else was encased in Plaster of Paris, with his legs set in a horse riding position. Dad was great. He worked out immediately what special arrangements would need to be made.

He got out his tools and made an elaborately shaped wooden support to hold Paul’s plastered legs whenever he was laid down. Then he took the expensive high chair and made perfectly shaped cut-outs in the seat, in order that Paul might sit in it. It was a bit of a circus, but we managed. Shortly however, the circus would be leaving town.

# **Chapter 9** Sauce for the Goose

Whilst all of the above had been going on in Manchester, there was of course another, altogether too infrequent side to my life. I refer of course to my paternal family, mostly in Liverpool.

For some reason which I never understood, the Peggs always looked down upon the Yearsleys and never had a good word for any of them other than my father. This was typified by their attitude towards my father’s brother; my uncle Ernie.

Ernie had cut a fine figure, when younger, as a member of the Liverpool Scottish regiment. I was once shown a photograph of him, in full dress kilt, atop the castle ramparts, blowing the bugle at the opening of the Edinburgh Military Tattoo.

Like my Dad, Ernie. too, had left Liverpool. He had met and married my Auntie Agnes (Aggie.), who’s family ‘weren’t short of a bob or two’, and bought a large three bedroom semi. in a select avenue in Urmston. Right next door to Agnes’ mother.

In one fell swoop, he had committed the triple sins, of; marrying into money, becoming an owner, occupier, *‘what’s wrong with renting, like everyone else’*, and sucking up to his in-laws. As if this attitude were not enough, the fact that for some reason Agnes couldn’t have children, was talked of as if it were some kind of divine retribution to offset their financial status. ‘*Serves them right.’* they used to say. Possibly to compensate for the lack of children, they had a large, ginger, scruffy looking, friendly Cocker Spaniel. This attitude caused me a great deal of pain and confusion.

Though I had been born into and brought up by, my mother’s family, I loved my father’s just as much. This animosity had a tearing effect, so I tried, in vain, to ignore it.

Agnes and Ernie., being financially better off than anyone else, on either side of my family, had everything *first*. Fitted carpets, vacuum cleaner, television, extension speakers, washing machine, and the list could go on. Later, when they moved to a retirement bungalow in the Euxton district of Chorley, they even had central heating; fed from an AGA. Unbelievable! Top of the list, however, must go, -

‘The Car’.

Initially, a second hand Standard Eight, then later a new Triumph Herald, Ernie, was very proud of his car, and looked after it lovingly. Visits *there* were always exciting for me, as there seemed to be always something new to see or do. This got even better after they got ‘The Car’, as most visits would include a ride out, usually into the countryside. My mother suffered these trips politely.

Outwardly pleasant, but inwardly seething. Not believing Agnes and Ernie. to be genuinely nice people, as I did, but condescending. I believe this attitude to have been simple jealousy, but grant that there may have been other factors, of which I was unaware.

On the rare occasions when *they* visited us instead, the ceremony of ‘locking The Car’, had to be seen to be believed. It annoyed my mother, but highly amused all my friends.

Ernie, would go around the door and boot handles at least three times, making sure they were properly closed and locked.

Then he would look around at the assembled kids and ask them politely but firmly, not to play near ‘The Car’. Finaly, after polishing any smudges off the paintwork, he would go into the house. This, of course, would be the signal for all the above kids to laugh their heads off.

Once inside though, Ernie. couldn’t relax, paying frequent visits to the window to check that ‘The Car’ was alright.

Ernie, was a mixer at the Hoe’s Sauce factory at Monton in Eccles. Every visit, he would fetch us a free bottle of sauce. One visit, he fetched something extra, his wireless set.

It had stopped working and been replaced, so rather than throw it out, he thought his brother, ‘the engineer’, ‘might be able to do something with it.’

Sadly, Dad’s talents didn’t extend to things electrical. This, however, didn’t stop him from placing it on the dining room table, removing the back, complete with it’s warning label, plugging it in and poking around inside. It never crossed his mind that this might be extremely dangerous.

When he finally gave up on it, I moved in. I took it to pieces bit by bit, and stored them, by type, in used, red, OXO tins. The beginnings of my electronic spares collection. From the label stuck inside the perforated, cardboard back, I learned a new word, ‘superheterodyne’. It sounded great! Even if I had no idea what it meant. My first long technical word. But very definitely, not the last.

# **Chapter 10** The Scousers

Visits to Dad’s old home in Liverpool, were reasonably frequent. I really looked forward to them. Because of the distance, and travelling by public transport, we usually went for the weekend.

The trip began with a local bus to Manchester’s Lower Mosely Street Bus Station, now the site of Manchester’s Bridgewater concert hall. Here we would board a Ribble or North Western bus, whichever was due to leave first, for Liverpool. If there was to be a delay, we might spend the time in the café across the street.

The bus station was an exercise in post modernist architecture, with heavy horizontal accents and acres of tile. I found it an exciting place. The busses there were exciting too.

Their styling and interior fitments fell somewhere between those of touring coaches and those of the local staging busses. A mixture of single and double deckers, most of the latter had low bridge-height bodies. This meant that on the upper deck, instead of the usual seating plan of a central aisle with double bench seats down either side, the left side had a row of four seat benches. The aisle then, was sunken into the floor, down the right hand side, under the windows.

This allowed for a body height, which could negotiate low bridges, but resulted in the following problem. Tall passengers travelling on the upper deck, or on the right hand side of the lower deck, under the dropped upstairs aisle, had very little headroom. It was a common sight to see people hitting their heads, as they stood up without due caution.

The busses took two routes. Through Eccles and Patricroft, then either straight on over Barton Moss, where you could often see large ships apparently sailing through the grassy fields, and on via Irlam, Cadishead and Warrington, to Liverpool.

The ships, were in reality sailing on The Manchester Ship Canal, its water, invisible from the road. Back then it was a very busy waterway, but few ships pass that way today.

Or, alternatively, via Worsley and onto the East Lancs. Road. For some reason, this last route was often broken by a stop at the Toby Jug Café, next to Carr Mill Dam reservoir.

Liverpool was a city of major excitement. It had its waterfront, with the Pierhead and ferries, the Overhead Railway, known as ‘The Dockers Umbrella’ and, last but not least, it still had its trams!

These were divided, by my father, into two distinct categories. Streamliners and Boneshakers. These last were the old style, flat roofed, four-wheeled truck, cars, with wooden slatted seats, and yes, the ride was very rough. The well upholstered streamliners, by comparison, ran on sprung, double, articulated bogies. Most of them, that is.

There were some streamliners, which didn’t seem as smooth as the others. These were the so-called Baby Grands, which were in reality four-wheeled boneshaker chassis masquerading in streamlined coachwork. No matter, I loved them all. They ran for much of their routes on wide, grassed, reservations, down the centre of broad, tree lined dual carriageway boulevards. Lording it over all the other traffic.

Getting on and off, though, posed a bit of a problem. The trams were in the middle of the road, but the stops were on the pavement. To get from one to the other meant braving the motor traffic.

If we were on a tram which reached a terminus, there followed the ritual of reversing it. In reality, the tram stayed precisely where it was but the driver changed ends, and the trolley pole was pulled down by its rope and swung round to face the other way. Then the guard would walk the length of both decks pushing over the seat backs, so that they also would be reversed. This is where I came in. I would *help* the guard. By pushing over all the seat backs on our deck, before he could. This I used to accomplish at great speed and with a noise like a machine gun, especially on the bone-shakers. Bang, bang, bang, bang, bang. Wonderful!

Visits to Deanscales Road always seemed exciting, especially after my father’s parents died. I know this sounds a terrible thing to say, but the house seemed to come alive. There was more room, more noise and more fun. With the wisdom of age, I now know that the reality of caring for ageing parents can be a great strain.

Though my Auntie Frances, Uncle Tommy and cousins Brian and Ian loved them, it was only when the *old* Yearsleys had passed that the Allens could truly begin *their* time in the house.

There was one small thing about the house, which I found very odd. The bath and its attendant hot water system were in the kitchen. Separated from the body of the room by a vertically boarded, shiplap partition. The bath, when not in use, had an old door over the top, as a lid. When this *lid* was removed, it revealed the family’s collection of shoes! Each time the bath was used, the shoes all had to be removed.

Saturday’s arrival was always greeted with much hugs, followed by a roast beef dinner with Yorkshire pudding. Now, I’d had Yorkshire pudding before and I’ve had much since, but I know I’ll never taste Yorkshire pudding as good as my Auntie Fran’s !

Whilst we were there, Mam’s attitude changed completely. She really seemed to enjoy *herself* too. Whether she was just being diplomatic or it was because she was away from the influence of her own family, I’ll never know. Folk, eh?

The adults always went out on the Saturday night and Dad and Uncle Tommy came back drunk, in a happy way. Us lads were then put to bed, all together, top and tailed, in the big, front room, double bed. Too excited to sleep, for trying to decide what we would ask to do the next day.

If Sunday dawned wet, then we might just opt to stay in and fool around. If, however, it dawned fine, then we might take the ferry to Birkenhead or New Brighton. A bus ride, to Southport or North Wales. Or visit Dad’s other sister, Edie, who lived with her husband George and their kids, on Kelsoe Road, in another part of Liverpool. We seemed to pack a lot in, but home time always came around too soon.

The really best visits were at New Year. Having Scottish connections, the Liverpool side of my family always celebrated, Hogmany style. Sometimes a relative would appear, to first foot, in full highland dress, complete with a dirk down his sock. Happy days!

**Chapter 11** Parts Unknown

Back in Fallowfield, things were now quite crowded. With the addition of baby Paul, we now numbered, eight at 194. The big, front double bedroom didn’t seem so big anymore. Mam told me, however, that things would be better soon. It seemed that with the addition of Paul, we now had enough points, *whatever they were*, to get a house of our own.

Things moved fast after that. We had been offered a new, three bedroom, council house, in Woodhouse Park. On the far side of Wythenshawe. All this meant nothing to me, but I was very excited. The inclusion of the word Park made it sound very grand. I wanted to know where, when and how? All I was told was ‘all in good time’. It turned out that Mam knew someone else who had already accepted a house there. We had been invited to visit, to see what it was like.

The next Saturday, the Yearsleys, along with Nana. and Auntie Clarice, walked round to the bus stop outside the Parade chip-shop on Princess Road and boarded a number 46 bus. This was the first time I can remember riding a bus *away* from the city centre. Not far from where we got on, Princess Road became a dual carriageway, with a broad grass strip down the centre.

This reminded me of Liverpool, and yes, Dad confirmed that this was where the tram tracks had run, out to Wythenshawe. Unlike Liverpool, whose tram reservations are now full of large trees, the one down Princess Road, is today, just as it was when the tracks were taken up.

Eventually we reached a large public house, The Mersey Hotel, close to a small bridge over what I was told was the River Mersey. I found this confusing. I knew the Mersey well, or so I thought.

It was that big stretch of water at Liverpool, which you could sail over on the ferry, or drive under in a tunnel, wasn’t it? How could this be the Mersey too? Was it a different Mersey? No! It was quickly explained to me, on a bus, at the age of four, on the way to survey our possible new home, how rivers start out as small streams, grow into bigger ones, as at this point, and continue to grow as they get nearer to the sea, like at Liverpool. Schooling on the run. I always demanded an instant explanation of any question that cropped up. And I still do. Still the ‘Y’ boy!

Dad also explained that the River Mersey, here, *had* been the southernmost boundary of Manchester. Until recently, close to here, he said, had stopped the tram tracks, the busses, and also the road. Everything beyond had been green fields and narrow lanes. Where those fields had stood, our 46 bus now continued on. It drove through an area of relatively young housing, the first phase of the suburb of Wythenshawe, until it reached an odd feature. In the middle of a tract of open fields, the road swung violently to the left, swept around in a right-hand curve, then swung violently left again. Thereafter, continuing in precisely the same direction as it had originally.

We had paid our tuppence ha’penny fares to the ‘S Bend’. This, apparently, was it. Even though it was not S shaped, the guard called it out and we got off. Many years later, the mystery of the S Bend was solved. It was in fact, half of a future roundabout.

When eventually Woodhouse Park’s premier road, originally called Civic Centre Road, was built, it was to intersect the existing road at this point. The roundabout had thus been half built to save money. It didn’t of course. Come the time, the original works had fallen into such a state of disrepair that the whole roundabout was rebuilt from scratch. The bottleneck caused by the ‘S Bend’ had never been necessary.

Now, these many years later, that roundabout has gone. Replaced by a complex junction for the Manchester Metrolink. The trams have returned. What goes around comes around, but not here. Of the ‘S’ bend and roundabout, no signs remain.

Civic Centre Road, now renamed Simonsway, never has been completed. Originally laid out as a showpiece, dual carriageway, boulevard, only one side was ever built, again to save money. The site of the other carriageway remained, until recently, as a broad grassed verge. The huge, twin armed lampposts, which ran along what was to have been the central reservation, have long since been replaced with more modest single armed ones. This piece of cost saving worked. Well, for now at least. The dual carriageway plans have given way to the trams, which now run down that wide verge.

After alighting from the bus, we crossed over the main road to the nearest minor road with houses on it. A woman welcomed us in and gave us a tour of her new home.

Everything was so new, so clean, so very different to anything I was used to. The adults were clearly impressed and I was sure that my parents would accept the offer of a house for us too. I was right.

On the way home the subject was broached. ‘How would you like to live round there then?’ I was asked. ‘With all those fields and farms and fresh air, and with a nice new house?’ I wasn’t daft, I knew we had to go, but I was also sad and scared at the idea of leaving the only home I’d ever known. ‘Will we still be able to go back to Nana’s?’ I ventured. ‘Yes, often.’ I was told. And so, I agreed.

Soon after that, we were making a second trip in the same direction. Just Mam, Dad and me this time. Even baby Paul had been left behind. As the bus approached ‘The S Bend’ and the guard called out that stop, I made to get up. ‘Not yet,’ I was told, ‘this time we’ve to get off at The Mixer.’ ‘What’s that?’ I said. ‘I don’t know,’ Dad replied, ‘but the guard will let us know when we’re there.’

A few stops further on, the guard bawled ‘Mixer’, up the stairs to the top deck where we were sat. He needn’t have bothered! We already knew! Almost directly opposite the bus stop stood the most enormous concrete mixer any of us had ever seen.

The same shape as any ordinary mixer, but the scale was huge. It towered over everyone and everything for miles around. It stood on four massive girder legs and was charged by a grab crane, which scooped ingredients from silos alongside and dropped them onto a conveyor belt. This then carried them to the top of the gantry and tipped them into the upturned mouth of the drum. The resulting mix was discharged directly down into large tipper lorries (no mixer trucks then), which queued up to drive between the massive legs. A cover was then stretched over the load, to stop splashes, and they drove off, slowly, with liquid cement leaking from the tailgate seams. But, why?

We very soon found out. All the roads, many of the houses and blocks of flats on the estate were being made in the cheapest possible way; by casting them out of concrete. ‘The Mixer’ was giving birth to the entire estate, from that huge metal womb.

Adjacent to the bus stop and also on the opposite side of Portway, as the road is called, was just one big builder’s yard. Along with The Mixer, it completely straddled a large T junction at the very heart of the estate. From this point building work was spreading out in every direction. The place was alive with lorries, dumper trucks, cranes and all the other paraphernalia for turning virgin farmland into Manchester’s biggest overspill, dormitory estate. Included in this paraphernalia were - Steam Rollers! Yes, real, live, coal burning steamrollers. Metaphorically and literally, the place buzzed. And we were going to live here!

The bus drove away, leaving us standing there, in the middle of this strange place. I felt that strange mixture of excitement and trepidation, which has always accompanied negotiating major crossroads in my life. Though they smiled and acted normally, I could tell my parents felt the same. Hanging between them, by the arms, they swung me across the street.

Portway, like all the other main roads, had of necessity, already been topped off with its concrete, and lined with flagstone pavements. We walked a hundred yards along the pavement opposite to the bus stop. Backing the pavement was a simple, wooden paling fence, surrounding the construction village of rough wooden huts. We passed them and turned left.

The sign said ‘Stoneacre Rd.’, but of a road, there was no sign. Apart from the fact that the buildings were made of brick, it was like a scene from a ‘Western’. The line of the road was marked in cinder ash. The houses stuck up incongruously from a sea of mud, each block surrounded by a narrow, rough path of, what else, concrete? No pavements. No gardens. No grass. No trees. No hedges. Just brick and mud; lots of mud. We trudged down the *road*, our feet scrunching on the rutted ash, looking for number 16.

It soon became obvious that we were on the leg of yet another ‘T’ junction. The planners, for reasons known only to themselves had decided to take Stoneacre Rd. up the leg of the ‘T’ and then turn it left, along the crossbar.

Turning right, onto the crossbar, put you onto a different road altogether, Tayfield. We turned neither left nor right. Number 16 was almost directly ahead.

It’s neighbour to the right, was on Tayfield. Not only that, but it was also on an entirely different level. It towered above 16 Stoneacre. The reason for this was very simple. All the houses on Stoneacre Rd. were built at the same level. The road, however, rose. This meant, that although the ground in front of the left hand, neighbouring house, number 18, was level with the road, ours was not. It was twisted, like a propeller blade. The mud patch immediately in front of the house’s side gate, where the path would eventually be, was at a considerable slope. This was the cause of considerable consternation, especially from my mother. ‘However are we going to get the pram down this.’ She said. ‘Worry about that later.’ said Dad, ever practical. There being no path, he worked his way around to the left of the property, and crossed to the house where the mud was level. Mam and I followed.

Now, most of the three bedroom houses on the estate, were built to just two basic plans. The ‘L’ type and the ‘Sunshine’ type. These, both in right and left-handed derivatives, were arranged as pairs of semi-detached or in terraces of varying lengths and shapes. Along with a few larger designs, to cope with big families, and the odd custom design, to fill an awkward gap, these constituted the bulk of the estate.

16 Stoneacre is the right handed of a pair of ‘Sunshine’ types, at the end of a terrace of four houses. These were used to take terraces around convex curves. Singly for 45 degrees, and in pairs for 90 degrees. The light, sand textured bricks shone, totally unlike the smooth, red, common bricks of Lloyd St.

The woodwork gleamed, under its fresh coat of white gloss paint. Except, that is, for the front door.

This was unlike any front door I had previously seen. A flat, unpanelled door, it had a single, small, rectangular window, glazed with bubble obscured glass. To the left of and dropped slightly out of line with the window, was a combined doorknocker and letterbox. The flap was vertical and opened sideways, against a strong spring.

This door, like every other door I could see, was painted bright blue. Dad took from his raincoat pocket, a pair of shiny, new, Yale keys. Attached to the keyring by a piece of knotted string, was a brown, luggage-type label, with some writing on it; presumably, the address. With some difficulty, Dad put one of the new keys, in the new lock, and turned it. The bright blue door opened!

Dad stood aside for Mam and me. I was allowed to enter first. Many years later, when brother, Paul and I emptied the house, prior to handing-in the keys, I was also last out. First in, last out. Thus setting a pattern, which has cropped up repeatedly in my life, ever since.

**Chapter 12** Open House

It was like stepping into a deserted cave. The bare, distempered walls, hard composition floors and un-curtained windows. The whole place reverberated with every step taken, with every word spoken.

My parents whispered, for a while, as if they were in a library or church. Not me though. Like any small child, I ran through the empty rooms, eager to explore and discover. What I discovered, was that in almost every respect, this house was totally different from the one in which we currently lived.

Firstly, instead of having a plain rectangular ground plan, with plain rectangular rooms, this one had a bend in the middle. The rooms next to the front door, that is, the kitchen at the front, with its washhouse *(utility room)* behind, formed a normal rectangular pattern. But, the other door at the end of the hallway, instead of being opposite and parallel to the kitchen door, was next to it at an angle of forty-five degrees. So was the entire room behind it, The ‘Sunshine Lounge’.

In this fashion, as I’ve already described, the designers had cleverly produced a house, which went round corners. This allowed maximum packing density, with no ugly gable ends showing, or wasted land. We never called it ‘the lounge’ of course. Only snooty people had lounges.

The ‘sunshine lounge’ was what is now commonly called a ‘lounge/diner’. About twenty feet long, ten wide, and with a large casement window at each end. The only strange things about this were that the lovely, *modern*, tiled fireplace was sited dead centre, plus, the dining area had a corner chopped off.

The reason for the first, was probably an oversight. It left just enough room to fit a dining suite in, but not enough to use it. The three-piece suite always got in the way. The second was a simple compromise.

The ground floor plan was basically two rectangles at an angle to one another. Space could be saved, by overlapping them where they met. The wash house stayed square, so the dining area lost a corner. This left a triangle of space between the two rectangles, filled with the hallway, stairwell, pantry, and three, stacked, built in cupboards.

The bottom one housed the gas meter, the centre one, the electricity meter, and the top one was free for storage. Pretty neat.

The kitchen was big! It had a brand new, streamlined, gas cooker, built in drawers, worktops and a stainless steel sink unit. You couldn’t even see the pipes.

Mam was overjoyed. She knew that such things existed, of course, but had never actually had her hands on them before.

The wash house actually had another sink. Two sinks! This one, though, was a porcelain slop stone, just like the one at Lloyd Street. Pride of place was taken by something I’d never seen before. A big, shiny, gas fired, copper wash boiler. What made the powers that be, at the town hall, include these, I’ll never know.

Most of them were sold for scrap without ever being used. Well, even my Nana, already had a washing machine, of sorts, even if it was gas powered. We, however, couldn’t afford one, so Mam had to put up with the boiler, and a poss, for the time being at least.

The back door led sideways off the wash house, into a small porch containing two doors. The one on the right, opened to reveal the coal-place, from where the open fire would be fed. The one on the left, opened to reveal… a toilet! An outside toilet! Just like I’d seen, and even had to use occasionally, at the very old homes of some relatives and family friends.

The high level cistern, long lead pipe, chain and pull, everything was the same, except for the seat. Instead of nice, warm, wood, it was cold, hard, black plastic. Just what was going on?

I soon found out.

On climbing the twisting staircase, the first door opened into a ‘modern’ bathroom. Fitted, panelled-in bath, wash hand basin, and last but not least, a low level, syphonic toilet suite. All these in white, of course, as is currently now back in fashion.

I’d never been in a house with two toilets before, let alone lived in one. I shouldn’t have got too excited though. Virtually everyone on the estate reverted to type.

The downstairs loos were abandoned, ignored, never even referred to, especially in company, and very, definitely, never, ever used. Downstairs and outside toilets were ‘old fashioned’, and that, I was left in no doubt, didn’t mean us!

Someone did use it, however. Me. Whilst playing out. This was dangerous though. The ‘smallest room’ *was* used, as a garden tool shed, and having a wee straddling a Qualcast lawn mower was no fun, I can tell you.

As already mentioned, this was a three bedroom house, so this accounted for the other three doors off the small landing.

The one immediately to the left of the stairs, was a good, big room. The master bedroom; its large window overlooking the street. That is, it would do when we eventually got a street.

I naturally assumed that this would be my parent’s room, with me getting the next biggest, and Paul, eventually, going into the smallest. Not so! For some reason, Mam and Dad chose to use the ‘second’ bedroom, facing the rear of the house.

Because it had a smaller window, plus it was north facing, it was very dull. Also, once they had moved their bulky, four-piece, matching, bedroom suite in, there was barely room to squeeze around the bed.

Folk eh?

Still, this left *me* with the big, front bedroom. Didn’t it? No, it didn‘t! - I was told that it *would* be mine, eventually, when I got a bit bigger. It never was.

In all the years that the house was in the Yearsley name, That room was never slept in, never decorated, and never even had any covering on its floorboards. Just used as a playroom, and for storage. Why?

So, I would be going into the smallest of the three rooms. This, however, wasn’t all bad news. It was only marginally smaller than the ‘second’ bedroom, so it still had plenty of space. Plus, it had two windows, so it was quite light, and in the corner was the airing cupboard, with its big, warm, copper cylinder. No central heating then, remember. 194 Lloyd Street had a gas fire in every big bedroom, but not here. Here, the only fireplace was the one in the living room. Bedrooms would get cold in winter, but mine would be the warmest.

Another thing in the house, which fascinated me, was the electric plugs and light switches. Whereas, I was only used to round switches that stuck out from the wall, and plugs with little round holes. Here, although they were made of the same, brown bakelite, the plugs all had big square holes, and they were everywhere. Also, both these and the switches were square and flush fitted into the plaster, Amazing.

Out the back, and the immediate realisation, was that for some time at least, there would be no privacy. Our house was one of about sixteen, arranged in a rough square with one corner rounded off. Ours!

The backs of the houses faced each other across a square of mud and weeds. There were no divisions of any kind. You could walk all over it, and peer into all the back windows. I did! Most of them, like ours, were still unoccupied. Only a few had curtains at the windows and smoke coming from their chimneys. One such was our joined-on neighbour, number 18.

The last thing of interest, around back, was the ingenious way that the designers had thought of stopping the tin dustbin, from being an ever-present obstacle on the pathway.

A dustbin-sized recess was built into the rear wall of every house. Inside, this recess took up the space under the washhouse draining board. Clever!

However, some years later, when the cleansing department decided to swap dustbins for plastic bags held in a wire, supporting frame, The ‘bin hole’, as we called it, became redundant. The houses all now had this space which they could not use. And the new rubbish receptacles blocked the back path in a way that the old dustbins never would have. Progress, yet again?

I decided to take a look at our new neighbours.

Sticking to the rough-tamped, concrete path, I circumnavigated number 16 and continued, past the front living room window, into number 18s territory. I didn’t get far. Sitting, blocking the path, under the front living room window of number 18, was a pram.

This pram, not dissimilar from our own, was rocking, and had gurgling noises coming out of it. I peered in.

“What are you doing?” Boomed a loud, old voice, making me jump. I turned to see the owner of the voice. A loud, old lady, with grey hair and beady eyes. This, it transpired, was the grandmother of the house, who had been keeping a close watch on the pram, through the window. “Er, what’s its name.” I asked, gingerly. “It’s not an it, it’s a he, and his name’s David.” Came the reply. By his appearance, David was about the same age as our Paul. I’d been hoping for someone closer to my own, to play with. “Do any other children live here?” I ventured. “Oh yes,” she replied, “our Barry’ll be about your age I should think. Would you like to come in and meet him?” I would! So I excused myself, ran back to number 16 for permission and pretty soon, not only myself, but Mam and Dad too, were in the home of our soon to be, new next door neighbours, the Winns.They were great, and offered us something to eat and drink, which we gratefully accepted. There was George, a council labourer, and his wife Dorothy, (Dot). Then there was their eldest son, just three and a half months my junior, whose name was also George. To avoid confusion though, he was always called by his middle name, Barry. Then, along with baby David, there was the grandmother, whose name I’ve sadly forgotten. Her bark was a great deal worse than her bite, however, and the two families became firm friends from that day on. We now knew, that we would be welcome in this strange land.

**Chapter 13** The Yearsleys Have Landed

We moved in soon after, leaving the parlour at 194 Lloyd St. South, quite bare. Only the new living room and my parent’s bedroom were fully furnished. Just where some of the furniture came from, I never knew. It certainly hadn’t been stored anywhere at 194.

The floors, however, had to remain totally bare for the time being. This wasn’t too bad downstairs. Mam polished up the composition floors a treat. Upstairs was a different matter. The bare boards would have to remain bare, ‘until we could afford some oilcloth’.

The only exception to this was in front of the tiled fireplace. Here was now placed a new, fluffy, hearthrug. This had been handmade, by Mam, using a home carpet-making machine, and had been hidden away until the day she had a home of her own.

The kitchen was virtually empty, apart from the fixtures and fittings already described. It served, for a while, as the parking place for Paul’s pram.

In the living room, the red, corduroy, three-piece suite finally had all its castors on the ground. Sharing the ‘sunshine lounge’, was a bulky, ’Jacobean style’, dining suite. The large, extending leaf table, sideboard and chairs all had circular, knobbly legs. Pride of place, however, went to ‘The Gilbert, model 85’ console, windup gramophone.

This fine piece of furniture, almost as long as the sideboard, had a full length, chamfer edged lid, and stood on short cabriole legs. These legs continued up as full height, square corner posts, framing a complex shaped central recess. This closed by a vertically slatted roller shutter. The whole thing was beautifully polished, and on raising the lid, with its automatic stays, the polish was contrasted by an almost fully blue velvet interior.



The heavy, precision turntable was on the right hand side, along with its chromed S shaped tone arm, needle trays and control levers. To the left, a record storage recess, full of 78s, and some removable panels, which Dad always contended, were to allow the fitting of an electric wireless. Thus the makers had allowed for its conversion to a radiogram. Altogether, it looked great. Sadly, it sounded dreadful.

The sound quality was not just bad, compared to modern equipment, it was worse than almost any gramophone I’d ever heard. This was not the manufacturer’s fault!

In all my memory, I’d always known that the roller shutter concealed a capacious cupboard. This was used for storing important papers and Dads stationery box. It was only when I became old enough to work it out, however, that it became obvious the cavernous interior had originally contained a large, tuned, sound horn. The small end had bolted firmly, to a flange on the underside of the tone arm swivel. The business end came level with the front recess, where it had been concealed behind a complex fretwork grille. The roller shutter, had been the volume control! (see photo)

I know Dad hadn’t been to blame, he’d bought it second hand, without realising there was a problem. Some berk, somewhere, had decided to utilise all that *wasted* space, by cutting away the fretwork grille and tearing out the horn. They had gained a cupboard, but ruined a wonderful instrument. It was a sin!

A borrowed, enamelled top table and some brown bentwood chairs went temporarily alongside the cooker, in the kitchen. ‘Until we can afford our own’. This completed the downstairs furnishings

Upstairs, my parent’s bedroom was crowded out, as already described, with a new, contemporary styled, four-piece bedroom suite. Plus, Paul’s cot, alongside the double bed.

In *my* room, three pieces of furniture appeared. None of which I had seen before, all very used. An iron framed single bed, with wooden head and footboards. A cane and rattan table, similar to the one at 194 which held ‘the wireless’. And lastly, to serve as a chest of drawers, an old washstand, complete with marble top, tiled splash-back and towel rail. Even in the best antique shops, today, you rarely see such a nice example. Sadly, then, the top and splash-back were regarded as unnecessary, and removed. Only the towel rail was left, as a reminder of its previous life.

That big front bedroom? Everything, which wouldn’t fit somewhere else, was just bunged in. Dominating them, a large, brown painted, tin steamer trunk, filled with bedding and curtains. It looked a little like a treasure chest, and to Mam I suppose it was. Wherever it had been stored, the contents must have been chosen with care, and collected piece by piece, as finances allowed.

**Chapter 14** Kids Stuff

I didn’t know it at the time, but virtually every family on the estate was there on the same points system as mine. This meant that in almost all the houses, there was someone around my age. We all had things in common.

Wrenched from the only homes we’d ever known, and all our friends. Dumped in the middle of nowhere, to get on with it. We gravitated together, girls and boys both, and stuck like glue. In no time at all, every street had its *gang*. There was nothing sinister about these, they were simply informal clubs. Stoneacre, being a long road, had two. One down at each end. There was friendly rivalry, but nothing more.

My immediate circle of peers was as follows: Next door at number 18 as I’ve already said, was Barry Winn and baby David. Next was Alan Ashburner, with his younger brother Arthur. Then at 22, George Hamilton, son of a Scots family.

In the other direction, in the houses on Tayfield were Annette Shaw, with younger sister Susan. Then Maureen Flemming. (*The Shaws and Flemmings, shared a pair of semis.)* Opposite were Linda Cox, Judy Cunningham, Frankie Galvin and his brother, sons of an Irish family, Chris Jones and John Whelan with his sister Gina.

Although the road curves smoothly past numbers 16 and 18, not so on the other side of the carriageway. The architects had failed to come up with a house design which would follow a concave curve. So all ninety-degree bends, on the estate, are curved on the one side with a right-angled corner opposite. Hence, the Galvin’s house was totally different from the rest. Much bigger inside, and with a huge double back garden to play in. Also, the wide, right angle in the road in front made a fine football and cricket pitch.

Unbeknown to anyone else at that time, George Winn had wanted that corner house but had had to settle for number 18, temporarily, biding his time. Two or three years later, when the Galvins moved on, the Winns, flitted the sixty feet or so across the road. What they couldn’t carry was moved on Dot’s electric milk float.

We kids played all the usual games, of course, Cowboys & Indians, complete with cowgirls and squaws, Mothers & Fathers, Shop, etc. But the most favourite game, among the lads at least, was ‘Helping the Builders’.

Unlike all modern building sites, there were no fences around the work in progress. No-one seemed to worry about any danger. At night and weekends the unguarded piles of sand and stone, pipes, window frames, plus the attendant plant, were a natural magnet. During the day, however, dressed in dungerees, we used to haunt the builders. Some were a little short with us, but most were happy to humour us by giving us little jobs to do. Several bricklayers were actually good enough to give us some bricks and mortar, and show us how to use them. Not on any house walls, but several low height garden walls must still hold the evidence to this day. Life was a great big playground, and I still hadn’t reached the age of five.

Then, there was the day that the road arrived.

**Chapter 15** The Wheels Begin to Roll

We had for some time been watching a team of surveyors and builders slowly creeping nearer and nearer. They were marking out the positions and levels for the pavements.

The kerbs were duly laid, haunched-in with cement and back-filled with ash, temporarily. A couple of days behind, followed the road layers. They simply raked the ash bed smooth, then laid wooden shuttering, held in position with pegs. A tall piece, down the centreline, with four tapering pieces leading at right angles from it to the kerbstones. A sheet of reinforcing mesh was dropped into each of the two sections marked out, then along came the lorries from ‘The Mixer’.

The concrete was poured, tamped, brushed from crown to kerb with a long handled, stiff broom, then criss crossed with planks and left to dry. Then the whole process was repeated, again and again, and, hey-presto, Stoneacre Road actually existed.

Once hard enough to bear traffic, along came a gang with a tar boiler. Their job, was to carefully prise out the shuttering boards and pour hot, liquid tar into the gaps. I’ve loved the smell of boiling tar and bitumen ever since.

Following on, a few days later, a train of lorries carrying flagstones. These were expertly rolled, on edge, from the backs of the lorries, to land, corner first, on the ash sidewalk. Here they stuck, and stayed, resting against each other in small groups, at regular intervals. Very few got broken. Eventually these were laid, all cuts being expertly made by hand, with a bolster chisel. No angle grinders then!

At last, we knew the extent of our front gardens. Not as large as we had hoped. But why were there still so many flagstones left over? We soon found out. The flaggers began to lay pathways, from the pavement to the houses. At last, my Mother thought, it would be possible to push Paul’s pram all the way to the front door, instead of manhandling it. Wrong again!

Because the location for our path was so steep, we got a flight of steps instead. In retrospect, it was the only thing to do. A path that steep, would have been lethal in slippery weather. Nevertheless, Mam was not best pleased.

Neither, I should imagine, was baby Paul, as his pram was alternately rocked up and bounced down those steps.

With the street both vehicle and pedestrian friendly at last, things began to improve apace. A gang from the Parks Department, brought lorry loads of beech hedging. With these, they divided garden from pavement, and garden from garden. Now, for the first time, everyone knew the exact extent of their own territory.

Being on a bend, meant that number 16 did rather well for its front garden. In back it was a different story. What had seemed a huge plot of land, in the centre of that circle of houses, was divided up very unfairly. Whilst most had useful plots, numbers 16 and 18 were left with slim triangles, and of the two, 16s was much the smallest. It was useless; save for hanging out the washing. And it wasn’t much good even for that.

The paving of the roadway brought one other thing to our door; tradesmen. Mobile shops, of every conceivable type, took turns to park in that big corner. The estate, as yet, had not a single shop of its own. There were milk floats, too, of course. Rag and Bone men, both hand carts and horse drawn. And last but not least, the Ice Cream men. Initially pedalling tricycles with a big icebox mounted over the front axle. These introduced us to the first milk lollies we’d ever seen. At 1d each, a low cost luxury. Before long though, the tricycle gave way to the motor van, with surprisingly, Vincent Granelli behind the wheel. We were glad to see him again.

Life in Woodhouse Park, during that summer of 1951, was a never-ending stream of surprises. Walking down Tayfield Road, one day, as we had a few times previous, to watch the construction, my attention was drawn to the large, vacant plot of land, just a few hundred yards from our front door. Up to that time it had just been another rough croft. One of many scattered about between the houses. Now though, it had been cleared, levelled, and there were signs of footings being laid out. “What are they building here, Dad?” I asked. “This,” he replied, “is going to be your school.”

“School? School!” I thought. No one had mentioned *school* before. I was horrified. Bad thoughts were soon left behind, however, when my parents took a turn, down the path of the second house from where the school’s main gate would eventually be.

The door opened, and there to greet us were The Cookes. ‘Auntie’ Elsie, ‘Uncle’ Fred, and of course my unofficial ‘cousin’ Elaine. Mam and Dad’s best friends had left their awful flat, and moved in near us. Things just got better and better.

The matter of ‘School’, however, refused to go away. I was told that I would have to start just after my fifth birthday, in August. ‘It’ll never be finished in time.’ I smiled to myself. I was right. So I would have to spend a term or so at an older school, some distance away, until it was. Still, there was the rest of the summer to enjoy, and enjoy it we did.

The gardens were licked into shape. Most households acquired a wheelbarrow. Though my Dad borrowed one from somewhere, he did make me a small one of my own, out of wood, so as I could *help*. These were used to move vast quantities of clay and stones from around the houses, to be dumped on the crofts. And to move similar quantities of good topsoil, from the crofts to the houses. Also, a goodly amount of sand, cement and cinder ash was spirited away from the building compounds, under cover of darkness and at weekends, to aid the landscaping efforts. Most children had a sandpit, and I was no exception.

In among the houses, were farms. These had been reduced to smallholdings by the development. The owners were holding out until they were forced to leave and all evidence of the farms would be erased. There was one such farm just around the corner. It had a lovely, black and white, half-timbered house, red brick barn, and surrounded by trees, a pond.

Fine evenings, we would walk round with the left over bread, and feed the ducks and geese.

**Chapter 16** A Flying End to Temperance

The mobile shops brought us everything we needed, bar one. The men folk dearly missed their local pubs and clubs. Woodhouse Park was, for the time being, dry.

Now, from our very first visit, I had been aware that we were somewhere near the airport. The sight and sound of aircraft, landing and taking off, was a constant companion. One which I enjoyed and soon got used to. Also, the rotating beacon lit up the night sky, and all south-facing rooms, every few seconds. But I had never given a single thought to the possibility of actually going there. The adults, however, had. They had discovered, that this, was where the nearest pubs were.

And so it was, that one bright, warm, Saturday evening, the Yearsleys, the Winns and the Shaws, complete with kids, struck out on foot, southbound. Up until that time, I had had no inkling of just how close we were living to the edge of the estate, the Lancashire/Cheshire border, and Ringway Airport.

Babes were in arms and I was in my big trolley, as in a very few minutes we crossed the building line and found ourselves in open countryside. The grids, road markings and pavements vanished, to be replaced by tall hedges, ditches, fields and trees. We came to a ‘T’ junction, and turning left were soon passing the sewage works, with its big circular filtration tanks and rotating sprinklers, which served the airport. The airport was at that time, a civil and military aerodrome. Being both Manchester Airport, and RAF Ringway, the home of 613, Vampire Squadron, at one and the same time. Having been built, out in the middle of nowhere, it would be some years before it was connected to the main sewerage system.

The airport and RAF base buildings, on both sides of the road, were soon passed, and we continued until we reached the end of the runway, where stood The Airport Hotel. Us kids were parked round the back, by a long disused and overgrown bowling green, where we were brought crisps and pop, whilst the grownups occupied themselves inside. Now and then, one of them would nip out to see if we were OK, but we were well occupied.

The Airport Hotel was, and still is, immediately adjacent to the eastern end of the original main runway. The two are separated only by the chain link, perimeter fence.

A fence to which we were glued, watching the aircraft movements.

Every time one of those big, propeller driven planes came to the end of the runway and turned around, the prop-wash blew our hair straight back and took our breath away. We were entranced. Even the girls.

Today, the hotel has changed little, and that old bowling green is now a Mecca for plane spotters, who line that chain link fence, complete with air-band radios and binoculars.

The following weekend, and the expedition was on again. This time however, we turned right at the T junction. This took us around the western end of the runway, which was nowhere near as long as it is today, and into Ringway village. Well, not into the village proper, just as far as the church and pub. St. Mary’s, and The Romping Kitling.

Just what a Kitling was, romping or not, I never found out, but some years later the name was shortened, by the brewery, to just ‘The Romper,’ which in my opinion is just as mysterious.

Opposite the church and pub were the backs to the hangers of Fairey Aviation, a once proud name in Manchester’s aviation history, atop the end of which, stood the source of that sweeping light, which lit up the night sky. The airport beacon.

These trips were repeated, on an irregular basis, with various changes of personnel, until such time as Woodhouse Park began to get it’s own ‘watering holes’. The Airport, however, would eventually come to have a big continuing part in my young life.

Often, on the way there or back, we would visit the *official* spectators viewing enclosure, to see the planes. This was on the right of the original terminal buildings, such as they were, right at the side of the Ringway Road. This actual spot is now way out on the apron, where the aircraft park. The new terminal was built on the opposite side of the road, well behind the old one, which was then knocked down.

Next to the original, though tarted up, RAF control tower, had been built what looked something like a sports grandstand. From the ground, to about half way up, there were the usual terraces. From there, on up to the roof, it was glassed in. Behind these big windows you could see people dining, in the airport restaurant.

Just to get into that *grandstand,* under cover, cost money we didn’t have. To go in the restaurant was unthinkable. That was for the elite. We had to make do with standing on an area of bare concrete, behind a chain-link fence.

To be fair, there was a small café, in a concrete prefab. with a corrugated roof. The simple fare was cheap and good, plus, the big windows ensured that no aircraft movement went unnoticed.

The propeller driven airliners, were extremely small by today’s standards. We thought them enormous. Next to where they stopped, was the pleasure flight area. This was run, by a company called Airviews, in much the same manner as boat rides at the coast. A small gate in the fence, allowed people to queue at a barrier. When the next small plane came back, they simply paid their money and went. The cost was five shillings, (25p).

Airviews had three aircraft. An Auster, a DeHaviland Dragon Rapide, and a Fox Moth, also a DeHaviland. This latter, was quite literally, a variant of the Tiger Moth biplane. The belly of the fuselage, beneath the open cockpits, was enlarged and had built into it a fully enclosed cabin, with a door, to seat four people. Dad said, that one-day he would ‘take me up’. He never did!

Dad was something of a paradox, in many ways.

A born joker, who always had a smile and a quip on his lips and, who, consequently, was liked by almost everyone who knew him. He was apt to be a bit thoughtless and selfish, indoors, however, but I’m reasonably certain that he didn’t realise this, most of the time.

Despite being Liverpudlian, he did have an odd, hybrid accent, which I never connected with the ‘Scouse’ of his Merseyside relatives. Though folk from outside our family seemed to pick it up. Strangely, although he had never, to my knowledge, lived in London, he habitually spoke fluent Cockney rhyming slang, just like a native of Bow. A habit which I myself have picked up from him.

Though he instilled in me, thrift, an ability to save, and a respect for money, he never exhibited any of these traits, himself.

“A penny saved is a penny earned. Look after the pence and the pounds will look after them selves.” etc. he would say, and I took it all on board.

I was even given a handmade, wooden, ‘magic’ moneybox. This appeared, to make money, which had been placed in a small drawer, disappear. It could only be retrieved by the use of a large screwdriver, to remove the base. Because of this, I always had enough spending money for the holidays. It truly was a magic device.

Dad, though, seemed to always have the price of a couple of pints, and not much more. At the local Labour Club they installed one of the earliest, electronic gaming machines. A one armed bandit, without an arm. An armless bandit, I suppose. Armless it may have been, harmless it was not. More of Dad’s money began to vanish, into its slot. The ultimate ‘magic moneybox’, you might say.

He *was* reasonably lucky, though, and won much of his money back. His pals called him ‘Stuffy’, because of this, plus his habit of finding money in the street.

I knew, because he confessed to me, that luck had little to do with it. His calculating, engineer’s mind enabled him to gauge the rhythms of the machine, such that he always knew when a payout was about due. Then he would wait for the current hapless sucker to give up, and step in. Often he was right, but not always.

The only real winner was the machine, and of course the Labour Club. The machine paid out in tokens, spendable only on the premises.

Like just about every other adult, in our circle of friends and relatives, Dad’s singular hopes of putting his life on a firmer financial footing, rested solely upon his chances of ‘winning the pools’.

The eternal quest for eight draws, (they didn’t even have to be score draws, back then), and that elusive £75,000 jackpot, was the pot of gold at the end of the working man’s rainbow. It still is today, for many, but now its place has well and truly been usurped by the National Lottery or Lotto as they now call it, with its ludicrously huge prizes.

Religiously, every week, the coupons were carefully filled in, with their intricate patterns of little Xs. Then they were posted off, along with the stake money, to Littlewoods or Vernons Pools.

Strangely enough - both in Liverpool.

I had an idea, even at that young age, that people who live a ‘jam tomorrow’ existence, may well have little incentive to try any harder at working to improve their lot today. Nevertheless, come Saturday afternoons, I would be there, glued to the radio or TV, to listen to the football results and watch Dad check off his coupon.

There *was* a certain excitement to be had, I grant you, and occasionally Dad did win; very small dividends. The crumbs, thrown to the faithful, to ensure that they would keep coming back, week after week.

Years later, when I was old enough, I too ‘did the pools’, just the one time. I didn’t win, of course, but the fact that I had tried and failed, cured me of wasting any money in that way ever again.

So, I was not to see Woodhouse Park from the air, until many years later, and then not from an Airviews pleasure flight. If Dad *had* ‘Taken me up’ then, with inflation it would have cost ten bob (50p), and ten bob notes weren’t for chucking around on flights of fancy.

**Chapter 17** Wheel Meat Again

August 19th 1951 was approaching fast; my 5th birthday. I asked if I could have a party, and invite all my new friends. It was agreed, and so we had a great time. Playing all the usual kids party games, it was the first and last party I ever had as a child, and remember it very well. Everyone brought me a card and a small present, but my best present, of course, was from my parents, a shiny new tricycle.

Now, I already had a small, tube and tinplate trike. That type, with the pedals as extensions of the front axle, is still popular today, except that the tinplate seats have now been replaced with plastic. The new one, however, was built just like a regular bike, except that it had two rear wheels, mounted on a crossbeam beneath the saddle. It was maroon, had mudguards, geared up chain drive, lamp brackets, everything. I was made up.

Since the paving of the street, there had been very little growth in motor traffic. Apart from the mobile shops, most of the wheels on the road belonged to us kids. There were bikes, trikes, pedal cars, bogeys, and roller-skates. The only adult personal transport down our end of the street, belonged to Chris. Jones’s Dad, Ivor.

Ivor Jones drove a Triumph motorcycle combination. A big, twin-cylinder motor bike, with an even bigger sidecar bolted alongside. This was oval in shape, seated three in comfort, in two seats, and had a roll back fabric sunroof. On fine days he must have dreaded coming home from work, as a gang of lads would always be waiting for him. “Give us a ride round the block, Mr. Jones?” we would chorus, until he inevitably gave in. Then we would all pile in.

The sidecar may have only seated three in comfort, but it took at least half a dozen young boys, standing on the seats and hanging out of the sun-roof, while Ivor Jones threw that big twin around the corners, to make us all squeal with delight.

Otherwise, it was extremely safe for us youngsters to monopolise the carriageway with our own various forms of personal transport, if we used them sensibly, that is. My new tricycle stood a couple of inches taller, longer and wider than everyone else’s. I don’t know why, but while all the others were the same, standard size, my parents had found me one, which stood out. It was the biggest!

All the other kids wanted to ride it in preference to their own. If I got off and turned my back for a second, someone would pull a swap, and I’d be stuck with their, smaller machine.

The one disadvantage of having the biggest was that it was slightly harder to control. The extra height and weight simply meant that there was further to fall, and it would hurt more if it fell on you. This, I found out the hard way, with a lesson in centrifugal force thrown in for good measure.

The added wheel diameter meant, quite simply, that all other things being equal, it would go faster. Races were a favourite pastime.

One time, having left the others standing I decided, on the spur of the moment, to turn around and meet them face to face. Without slowing down, I turned the handlebars fully to the right. The front wheel turned, the tricycle did not. Instead, it rolled fully over, at least twice, with me still on it. Each time, my head coming into contact with the ground.

My friends carried me home in tears, where my mother covered the grazes with butter, and gave me a lump of the same, dipped in sugar, to shut me up. It always worked.

The only other notable wheels on Stoneacre Road, belonged to Mr. Erasmus.

Mr Erasmus was the head of the only black family in the street, and we knew him through his son, Michael, who was a member of the gang down at the other end. When Mr. Erasmus came by, we would get off the road, stand on the pavement, and stare. Not because of his colour, but because that dude had style!

He dressed with style, he walked with style, and when he rode, he rode with style. Bolt upright and tall in the saddle, with a big smile on his face. We waved as he went by, and he waved back.

Originally he rode an immaculate, big framed, black Raleigh. This, one day, appeared with a small motor fitted over the front brake. The mudguard had been modified to accommodate the motor, about the size of a large model aircraft engine, which turned the front wheel by way of a friction pulley resting on the tyre.

We watched entranced as Mr. Erasmus, feet and pedals perfectly still, glided down the road, around the bend, and out of sight.

This didn’t last long, however, before it was replaced with a somewhat larger motor, covered by a rectangular metal box, fitted in place of the rear carrier.

Along with this modification, came others. The Raleigh sprouted a tall windscreen and chromed mirrors. Number plates had been added, and Mr. Erasmus sported a white, Stirling Moss style, peaked helmet, with leather earflaps.

Eventually, the Raleigh disappeared. In its place, a shiny, new, LE Vellocette, motorcycle. This was the type, which for many years was to become standard equipment with most police forces throughout Britain. Water-cooled, and with a high level of standard equipment.

Mr. Erasmus had added a radio. Mounted in the same way as the police radios, in a box on the rear carrier, his had the same type of tall whip aerial, and could be listened to, either through a horn speaker, mounted behind the windscreen, or headphones built into his helmet’s ear flaps. Cool!

**Chapter 18** Academia Here I Come

September, inevitably, rolled around, as I knew it must. I had been watching the walls of my future primary school rise from the dirt, with some interest. I realised that they were not rising fast enough, and felt safe. Wrong!

It seems that I just had to go to school, no matter what. So if not here, then where? I soon found out.

Along with a number of my friends, I was temporarily enrolled at the nearest school with vacancies, Haveley Hey. This was sited in what *had* been the *old* over-spill estate, Hollyhedge, on the other side of Civic Centre Road. I knew approximately where it was, we made the trip occasionally, on foot, whenever we needed to visit our doctor’s surgery or the nearest proper shops.

This meant crossing a wide area of overgrown, disused farmland. There *were* some remains of lanes, in a state of disrepair, but mostly it meant picking a way cautiously around hidden ditches, fetid ponds and piles of rubble.

Eventually, we had been told, this was where Wythenshawe’s showpiece Civic Centre would be built. All that would exist of it for an awful long time, however, would be the name of the road. Was I going to have to run this gauntlet, every day, there and back? Never fear, I would be going by bus.

I was taken, for the first time, by my mam. I was by no means alone. A great many newcomers were being shown around the old style, red brick and pitched roof, school buildings, which must have seemed the cutting edge of educational architecture, not so many years before.

The single story classrooms were arranged in two ‘C’ shaped blocks, forming a quadrangle, and ran along the edge of the playground, separated only by a wide path, covered by an overhanging veranda. The entire length of each classroom wall, beneath the veranda, was composed of a multi-section, glazed shutter, which could be slid back, concertina style, completely opening the classroom to the outside. In all of the short time I was there, this never happened. The end panel only, was ever opened, serving as the classroom door.

This device was common to many schools around that time, and was due entirely to some of the planners fearing that children, stuck in closed rooms all day, would not get enough fresh air. A laudable idea but maybe not in our climate.

And so, every morning for the next few terms, I was walked to The Mixer, to catch the school bus. There was a whole fleet of them, and it was important to get on the right one, or risk fetching up at the wrong school.

I never understood why so many friends had to be split up here every day, to be reunited in the afternoon. Couldn’t whole roads be sent to the same school? Apparently not. There doubtless was a good reason, I hope.

3-30 each afternoon, the bell went and we were let out of our cage, that’s the way it felt anyway, and we would run for our busses, which were pulled up, in a long rank, outside the school railings. This was OK, unless there was some distraction.

Unfortunately, I have always been easily distracted into doing the wrong thing at the wrong time, and I several times, missed the bus. The first time this happened, I was totally distraught, for a while.

I had been playing or talking to one of my classmates who lived nearby the school, and hence didn’t need to catch a bus. By the time I realised that I ought to be on my way home, the last bus had gone. What to do?

There was only one thing I could do in the circumstances. Shanks’s Pony. At five years old, with my drawstring pump bag over my shoulder, I began to walk. Thankfully, I’ve been blessed with a good sense of direction, and arrived home, eventually, tired and footsore. Mam was out of her mind with worry, but what else could she have done? Nothing!

There were no phones, no cars, and no way to go looking, except on foot, so she just waited for me to turn up. Not that I was welcomed with open arms, you understand.

My Mam could shout, and shout at me she did, until she had expended her worry. Then she wrapped her arms around me, before giving me my tea.

Haveley Hey, County Primary School was just an average school, of its time. It had average size classes, who’s pupils sat at wooden, sloping topped desks with opening lids and inkwells. These were built in pairs, each with an attached two-seat bench, arranged in ranks, facing the teacher’s desk and blackboard.

Only four things, about this period of my life, have left indelible memories.

Firstly, sitting cross-legged on the parquet floor of the assembly hall, every morning; staring up at the tall, round topped windows and at the Argyle pattern on my knee length socks, whilst attempting to learn the words to The Lord’s Prayer and All Things Bright and Beautiful.

Next, anyone needing to go to the toilet had to raise his or her hand and attract the teacher’s attention. Once given permission, they were asked if they would be needing paper. If the answer was in the affirmative, the teacher would tear two sheets, from the roll of toilet paper kept on the corner of her desk, and hand them over.

I found this system deeply humiliating, and tried never to need to go during class. Just the one time, however, I lost the battle, and wet myself, leaving a puddle on the classroom floor. In trying to avoid one indignity, I was subjected to another. The process of being allocated a pair of shorts, from school stock. These were way too big, and got me laughed at for the rest of the day. I had to go home in them too, my wet pants in my pump bag.

Thirdly, whilst there, The King died.

This fact, along with the mechanism of succession was explained to us, insofar as we were capable of understanding it.

King George’s eldest daughter, The Princess Elizabeth, we were told, would soon be crowned our Queen. Then, to really confuse our young minds, we were told that she already *was* The Queen. She had been, in fact, from the very moment that her father had died. Then we had to say a prayer, and chant, “The King is dead, long live The Queen.”

We were also told, that throughout the length and breadth of the land, flags would be flown, but only halfway up their poles. Whenever we saw one, we would be reminded of The King. And so it was!

And lastly, whilst there, Laslo Biro’s brilliant invention, The Ballpoint Pen, was launched upon an unsuspecting Britain. Immediately, some of the teachers got one, mine included.

We had never seen anything like them. How could they write? Where was the nib? How do you get the ink in? All these questions, and more, were asked about the strange implements.

Actually, those first ballpoints looked remarkably like modern, cheap Bics.

The barrels were the same hexagonal shaped, transparent plastic tubes, except that they were tinted, not white/clear or opaque coloured. The only other substantial difference was that the ink tube, clearly visible within the barrel, was curled into a tight spiral. This made it many times longer than in a modern pen, and hence the ink would last very much longer.

The cost, in 1952? About £20!!

**Chapter 19** Coming Home to School

Eventually, the autumn term came to an end, and so temporarily, did my sentence at Haveley Hey. Things would return to normal for a bit, hopefully. Mam seemed to think otherwise. For the first time, but not the last, I heard the phrase, “Teachers rest, mother’s pest.” I was not amused.

The next milestone to look forward to, was Christmas and New Year. Not only being able to play, more than just at weekends, with my neighbourhood friends, but an extended visit back to 194 Lloyd Street South, in Fallowfield. My Grandparents, Auntie Clarice and Uncle Vic., were pleased to have me back for a while. This would be the first of many such holiday and sickness visits, over the following years.

The highlight of the Christmas period, in the Pegg household, had always been Boxing Day. On this day, each year, The chicks, who had flown the nest, would return, with *their* families, to make the extended Pegg family complete again, just for a day.

Previously, this had meant moving the presents into the parlour, opening up the leaves of the big dining table, and arranging extra chairs around the walls of the living room, wherever they would fit.

Then, my Uncle Eric would arrive, with my Auntie Edith and two cousins, Carol and Susan. They didn’t live very far away.

Later, sometimes much later, my Uncle Cliff., would turn up, with my Auntie Maureen and cousin Angela. They had quite a way to come, all the way from Newcastle on Tyne. Then an evening of catching up and amazing fun would ensue.

This year would be very different though. This year, The Yearsleys too, would be ‘coming home for Boxing Day’.

The festivities over for another year, and we were back home in our own, Christmas decorated, house. Kids were still riding new bikes, in the street, others still zipped about on new roller-skates. But, without any doubt, Christmas was winding down, in a way I’d never noticed before.

I had to return to school, at Haveley Hey, and it was business as usual. One day, however, some time after the death of King George VI, The Yearsleys and Winns, walked up Tayfield Road, to attend a pre-opening day at Poundswick County Primary School. The new building was, at last, completed enough to have a name.

Barry and I had become best friends, and it had been a real drag when I’d been sent off to school without him. Now, with his birthday, on 5th December, well behind him, he would be starting school too. When the new school opened for business, we would be going there together.

The thoroughly modern, flat roofed building, was eventually to house both Infant and Junior schools. For the time being though, only the infant section had been anywhere near completed. The rest of the site was still in disarray.

We were given an escorted tour through the finished parts of the building.

The two schools were being built either side of a single, large Dining Hall and Kitchen unit. Flanking this area, each school would have its own Assembly Hall. Both these halls *had* been completed, but beyond the Junior Hall, we could not go.

The Infant School was on a single level, but the Junior’s was to have two floors. We were shown the offices, toilets, playground, sandpits and classrooms. The parents spent a lot of time asking questions of the new staff.

We were asked to sit down, in one of the classrooms, on brand new chairs, behind brand new tables. Barry and I sat side by side behind the double table, centre front. It was the first and last time we would ever sit together in school.

Due to the fact that my birthday is mid August, smack in the middle of the School Summer Holidays, the authorities had decided, in their wisdom, that I should be ‘moved up’. So, I would be continuing in year two. Thus, the seal was set on the rest of my academic life.

I was to go through school, competing with classmates all older than myself. Some, virtually a full year older. Barry would be starting in the First Year. We didn’t think this was fair at all.

I took to Poundswick like a duck to water. I made new, school-time, friends, and did amazingly well at reading and arithmetic. This was due entirely to the pre school training I had received from my Nana and Auntie Clarice. For a while I went home every day, for lunch. So did everyone else.

We had to, there were still no facilities at the school, other than for those taking packed lunches. Soon, however, things changed. The kitchens were still not fitted out, so the Junior Hall was set out with trestle tables. Some for serving and some for eating from.

The food arrived ready cooked, by van, in stainless steel containers with clamped on lids. I thought it OK, but there were those who disagreed.

To be in a brand new school was totally different from being dumped into one which was fully up and running.

Everyone, pupils and staff alike had to find their feet. Not only did the building and grounds have to mature, we actually got to watch the grounds turned from a building site full of rubble, into lawns and gardens around us but also, traditions and rules of conduct too, had to be built from nothing. I really felt like I belonged.

The fact that home was only a matter of yards away, along a single length of uninterrupted pavement, helped a lot too.

The dining room and kitchens eventually opened, and so too did the Junior School. The dining hall was now divided from the junior hall by full width venetian blinds, which had hitherto gone unnoticed, their being in the raised position. The floor level of the Infants School and the dining hall were several feet above that of the junior hall. The difference was made up by three, wide, wooden steps, running the width of the hall.

The venetian blinds forming the end wall of the dining hall were not at the top of the steps, but about fifteen feet back from them. With the blinds up, this area could be used to extend the dining area. With them down, they formed the back wall of the Junior Stage, a stage with which I was to become very familiar in years to come.

I now led a double life, with two very distinct groups of friends. Street friends were acknowledged at school, but never played with. School friends were acknowledged in the street, as they passed by. The two overlapped very little.

Being small, blonde, toothless, cheesy looking, and with sticky out ‘cab door’ ears, I became an easy target for the school bullies. I learned to live with it.

It also made me the target for several little girls, who seemed to find me cute. Despite being ribbed about this by the lads, I didn’t mind a bit. From then on, through infant school and most of the way through juniors, I had a succession of *sweethearts,* sometimes more than one at the same time.

However much school was enjoyed, life was now forward looking. Towards birthdays, Christmases, ends of term, summer holidays, but most of all, ‘the end of school bell’.

Being in there might have been fun, it usually was, but being out of there was so much better. Life on the street in, Woodhouse Park, was still one heck of a hoot.

# **Chapter 20** Bright Green with Spots On

The estate might still have had no shops of its own, but religion was alive and well, despite it being in low profile. The Roman Catholics showed everyone else the way to get their act together.

Back on that first tentative visit to Woodhouse Park, sitting up front on that bus, as we came to the ‘T’ junction after the ‘S’ bend, and before the bus turned right onto Portway, I noticed something odd. Directly opposite the road junction was a plot of vacant land. Vacant that is, but for something which looked distinctly out of place.

At the extreme, right hand end of this plot, stood a large, military style Nissan Hut, painted bright green. This was St. Anthony’s Roman Catholic Church; temporarily, at least.

Known to everyone on the estate as just ‘The Green Hut’, this relic of the Second World War, was; Church Hall, Bingo Hall and, on Sundays, The Church itself.

On Saturday nights, however, it was something else altogether. It became the estate’s cinema. I was taken there, only once, by my dad.

A screen had been erected, on the wall behind the altar, and a sixteen millimetre sound projector was sitting on the roof of the small internal entrance porch. At the start of the show, the operator climbed a ladder and sat cross-legged next to it. The lights went down, and we were treated to a full programme. Cartoon, newsreel, B movie and main feature. Even ice cream in the interval. The only difference from a proper cinema, were the frequent stops to change the reel.

During the next week, I came down with measles. It was blamed on the visit to The Green Hut. We never went again, despite the fact that a good part of the estate continued to do so, in perfect safety.

The word of my affliction was telegraphed round the neighbours at the speed of sound. Shortly afterwards I found myself playing in the Asburner’s back garden, with all the other kids. The parents had organised a ‘Measles Party’.

And thus it was, that at a stroke it was discovered just who was already immune and who, shortly, would be, following a short, spotty episode.

The Anglican community erected the first, permanent Church building on the estate. William Temple’s was way down at the left-hand end of Portway, and comprised a large, multi-function hall.

This had all the trappings of a church, down at one end, and a proper, full-sized stage at the other. The length of the hall could be sub-divided into three smaller units, by way of concertina type folding partitions, to allow several activities to take place together at one time.

The whole place was available for hire. Weddings, birthday and Christmas parties, pantomimes, dances, film shows and more, took place there. I got to know the inside very well. So it was with some surprise on my part, that many years later a brand new William Temple’s Church building was erected, on Civic Centre Road (now Simonsway), miles from the original hall, which was then abandoned for some years!

One day, Dad asked me if I’d like to attend Sunday School. I said that I would. He explained that a colleague of his, from work, was going to start a House Group. I was none the wiser, but next Sunday he took me round to a house on Portway, the McGuire’s.

Paddy McGuire was a big gentle Irishman, who took me under his wing. The main group would be meeting in the living room; Sunday School was in the kitchen. I fitted right in.

Before too long, the group outgrew the house and had to move to larger premises. Poundswick, Junior School hall. What goes around, comes around! I didn’t know it at the time, but I was a junior founding member of Wythenshawe Methodist Church.

Every year, very smartly dressed, I took part in the Whit Walks. We took a long route around the neighbourhood, twice passing my own front door. One year, however, we were told that the walk would be longer than usual, and it was, much longer.

We walked all the way to the ‘S’ bend, where the procession turned into a nearby field. Here we were given a picnic lunch, with both hot and cold food and drinks. The hot items were heated on paraffin fuelled, primus stoves, which were extremely hard to light in the breezy conditions.

Then, refreshed, there was a short service, at which we were told that ‘In this field we are going to build our new Church’.

And so, eventually, it was, and still is. The ‘S’ bend and eventual roundabout have now given way to a major crossroads, but where we had our picnic in that field, stands a fine church. Unfortunately, it was now too far for me to travel, so I had to leave. I was not alone. I needn’t have worried though; something else was going on, much closer to home.

I’d generally had a lot of time for Mr. Ashburner, our next door, but one, neighbour. He was always D.I.Ying and gardening, and was very particular about everything that he did.

I once watched him for the best part of a day, as he fashioned a birdbath, from nothing more than bricks and flagstones. The top section was made from two flags, first cut down to make them square.

He drew a circle in the centre of the top one, by drawing around a toy, tin drum. Then, he chipped away at that circle, with a hammer and cold-chisel, for hours, until the middle just fell out. I’ve had to cut flagstones myself, in later years, and really do, now appreciate just how difficult that feat was. I was pretty damn impressed, even then.

So, when one day I espied Mr. Ashburner doing something in his front garden, I stopped to see what it was. What, in fact, he was doing, was erecting a notice board.

Now, this notice board wasn’t just a board on a stick, oh no! This board had a raised edging, around the sides and bottom. The top even had a little sloping roof, covered in roofing felt, to protect it from the rain. When it was all done, and painted, it began to bear notices.

What had transpired, was this. The Ashburners, under the influence of their Scots friends and neighbours, the Hamiltons, who were staunch Presbyterians, had decided to hold house meetings too.

The notice board was *The Church* notice board! Inviting people to join the group and giving times of services, etc. As, along with the other kids, I was always welcome at the Ashburner’s; it seemed natural for me to go along. The Winns were involved too, so Barry was often there.

This house group, just like the Methodist one before it, outgrew the house and moved on. Eventually becoming St. Marks’ Presbyterian Church, nearby on Portway. Just around the corner from the house where it had begun.

Now St. Marks’ United Reformed Church, the last time I visited the building was to attend Barry Winn’s funeral! He was tragically killed, as a very young adult, in a motoring accident in Belgium.

Either Mr. Ashburner, or someone else in the group, decided that it would be fun to enter a float, in the Wythenshawe Carnival. This annual event had taken on another dimension since the addition of Woodhouse Park. The new estate would now be included in its route, virtually doubling the length. He would borrow a coal delivery lorry from work.

Plans were made. I don’t remember the theme, but Barry and I very much wanted to be included, so we were. On the day, we ended up sitting on the back of the much scrubbed and decorated coal lorry, dressed as knights in armour. Our wooden swords were wrapped with red crepe paper.

Much of the decoration consisted of flowers, made of white crepe paper. So when it began to rain, and the red dye to run, Barry began enacting the ‘painting the roses red’ scene, from Alice in wonderland. Painting as many of the white flowers as he could reach, pink. I joined in.

The following year, it was decided to repeat the experience. The theme was to be the building of the estate. Barry and I were to be dressed as builders, in dungarees, and with trowels and bricks.

Somewhere down the line, however, these plans were dropped. Maybe there hadn’t been enough volunteers. Who knows? Unfortunately, they forgot to mention this to us, or to our parents.

The end result was that, on the day, there we were, with our mothers, all dressed up and waiting for the float. When it turned up, it was covered all over with a floral display, set onto a wire mesh framework. There was to be no-one riding on it.

There *were* apologies, but these came too late for two, very disappointed, dressed up, small boys, left standing there like a pair of lemons.

**Chapter 21** It’s a Hoot

Though separated in school, out of it Barry and I were, more often than not, to be found together. Either just the two of us, or with the larger group. We were into everything we were not supposed to be.

‘The croft,’ between Stoneacre Road and Portway, was, as I’ve already explained, covered with storage facilities for all the building materials. Some were in locked compounds, some were just sitting there in the open, like the sand and gravel, just waiting to be *borrowed* by the residents, and some were in locked cabins. All were under the not so eagle gaze, of a team of watchmen. The ‘Nikkis’

The compounds were easy to get into, and out of. It was just a matter of scaling the chain-link fencing. We became past masters at getting into the locked cabins too, especially the ‘Nikki’s Hut’.

Non of these cabins were of the easily portable, ready fitted out type, that they use today. They were all large, semi-permanent wooden huts. Like big garden sheds.

These had to be erected, roofed, made weatherproof, and then, in the case of watchmen’s huts, furnished. These furnishings consisted of, a large sturdy table with a bench either side, a couple of easy chairs, and a cast iron, coke burning stove, with a kettle on top and chimney, going out through a hole in the roof.

We did no harm. Vandalism or theft were never in our thoughts. Well, with one single, stupid exception. We merely enjoyed playing at grownups, in a place we had no right to be, and with the ever-present danger of discovery.

We took great pride in leaving everything just as we’d found it, and never were discovered. And that wasn’t just because we always had someone ‘keeping cavy’.

I guess the watchmen were just not that good at their jobs.

The exception? Well, one day Barry and I, for no good reason that we could ever explain, decided to take a fuse box each, from the electrician’s store cabin, as we passed by.

It was unguarded, the door was wide open, and these shiny, white, metal consumer units were stacked up just inside. We picked up one each and took them back to my house. Of course we were tumbled right away. These things were big and heavy. Not the sort of thing you expect to see two little kids staggering around with.

To cut a long story short, we were marched straight back to the site. There we were made to hand our spoils back to the foreman, and apologise.

The foreman gave us another good telling off, plus a lecture on the dangers of building sites, then honour satisfied, we were allowed to go. We never took anything again.

Also on the croft, at nights and weekends, was left quite a lot of plant. Mortar mills, cement mixers, dumper trucks, small cranes and telescopic, wheeled, wooden access towers. These were all the strongest of magnets, to growing boys.

Most of the stuff ran on little donkey engines, which we would try to start by mimicking the actions of the workmen. Sometimes we succeeded. Then panic would ensue.

The sound of a poorly silenced donkey engine carried for miles on a quiet evening. We might just have been playing at trying to get them started. We sure as hell *weren’t* playing at trying to get them stopped again. - Then, there was the Steamroller.

One night a group of us lads wandered onto the croft. Parked, right outside the Nikki’s Hut, was a steamroller.

Now this wasn’t the freshly painted and polished type of steamroller that you see nowadays at steam fairs. This was a dirty, grotty, freshly used, hard working steamroller. We made a beeline for it.

We were up and in that cab, like a shot. The fire had been dropped and the grate freshly laid, with newspaper, kindling and a layer of fresh coal for a quick start the following day. The boiler pressure had been vented off but the gauge showed that some there still was, and it was very, very warm. Lovely!

Suffice it to say we pulled every lever and turned every crank in that cab, in an attempt to get some action. Thankfully, we were totally unsuccessful. We even found out, in a most practical way, the fact that vehicles don’t steer at all well when they’re standing still. Especially the whopping great front end of a steamroller!

Even with four kids swinging on that steering wheel at the one time, that roller never budged. Nothing worked! Until, that is, someone pulled the chain connected to the steam whistle.

The residual boiler pressure vented itself to atmosphere, with a resounding ‘whoop’. The speed with which we put distance between us, and that steamroller, must really have been a sight to behold!

**Chapter 22** Don’t Rain on My Parade

The fact, that all over the estate not just at Poundswick, schools were springing up, signalled that the house building programme was nearing its conclusion. Time now to build the support services.

The huge builders yard on the opposite side of Portway was cleared. A lot of the stuff was brought over to the croft on our side. The rest mostly disappeared.

In the centre of this area began the construction of a large shopping centre; Minsterley Parade. The future focus of the estate.

Two, long, three storey terraces, shaped like Cs, back to back, faced each other across a broad space as wide as a road. Eventually, this was to be a spacious pedestrian area, the paths separated by broad grass verges. We watched with interest and mixed feelings, the walls of the shops rising from the mud.

The mobile shops were very convenient. Not only had they made us lazy, but also, we had made good friends of some of the shopkeepers. The upside was, that the parade would be some months in building, plus it was said, some of the mobile shops would be taking up residence there. Not every door would hold a stranger.

The day Minsterley Parade opened, was very exciting. Not all the shops were taken, or would be for some time to come. Those that were, however, gave us almost everything we needed.

Not only were there all the usual grocers, greengrocers, butchers, etc, but also a shoe shop, barbers, ironmongers, off licence, and even, eventually, a laundrette.

We had been a parasitic, satellite estate. Now we were self-sufficient. Other smaller parades were built, on odd corner plots, dotted about the estate. Non of them could touch Minsterley.

Odd then, that in recent years, all those small parades of shops are still going strong. Of Minsterley Parade, however, there is not a trace. It was allowed to fall into decay by the council. Who then knocked it flat and disposed of the land for private housing. But back then, that was over forty years into the future.

Either side and to the rear of the shops, were still considerable tracts of unused land. Something odd began to happen on the left-hand plot; the one visible from 16 Stoneacre, down the length of the lower stretch of the road.

A spider’s web of scaffolding was erected, supporting on end, huge pieces of sheet timber. It looked like a giant house of cards.

Up the scaffolding, a system of plank ramps was installed, by means of which; wheelbarrows could be pushed from the ground to the top. There was also a little, donkey engined lift, running up a lattice tower.

Then, a convoy of concrete lorries began to run back and forth, the short distance from The Mixer. The thick concrete was simply tipped in big heaps, from where it was barrowed, by ramp and lift, to the top, and poured over the sheets of timber.

What actually was going on was that the timber was double thickness with a gap in between; shuttering.

Blocks of flats were being constructed by the cheap, shutter and pour method.

In the middle of the shutter sets were obstructions, which the concrete would flow around to form windows and doorways. Even all the holes for piping had been allowed for.

No sooner had a row of shuttering been filled, than ones filled earlier were separated, moved up, and re-erected on top of the brand new but still damp concrete wall. This process was going on simultaneously for all of the perimeter and internal walls.

The same few shutters just went round and round, and up and up, until the walls were fully, and very quickly, built. Then normal, roofs, doors, windows and floors were added, and the whole circus moved on to the right hand side of Minsterley Parade, to do it all over again.

The land to the rear remained vacant for many years, until a high rise block of modern, glass clad, concrete flats was erected, by Bernard Sunley’s, to complete the site.

I would sit on a nearby bench for hours, watching the giant tower crane being used. Sad to relate, along with Minsterley Parade, all of these flats too, have been laid waste. All that work and all those lives, gone!

For what?

**Chapter 23** When Time Stood Still

Throughout 1952 I made frequent visits back to Fallowfield. I spent part of the six week summer holidays there. During this, and future extended visits, My Grandmother was determined that my time would not be wasted. My education would continue apace.

She taught me to cook, wash and hang clothes, use a sewing machine, sew on buttons, darn socks, and even embroider and knit! Oh, and one other very important thing, how to press trousers. “I’m pressing trousers for no man.” said my Nana. “All your uncles, and even your Granddad have to press their own trousers.” My Granddad, sadly, wouldn’t have to press his trousers for much longer.

After Christmas, Granddad took to his bed. I was allowed to go up and see him, when we went round. It was obvious he was unwell, but just how much and with what, was never revealed to me.

Mid March 1953, just before Paul’s second birthday, I was leaving home, hand in hand with Mam. It’s funny how she preferred to tell me things of importance, whilst out walking. She just looked down and said, “Your Dad and me have to go somewhere on Saturday, and you won’t be able to come. Your Auntie Dot. will be looking after you and Paul for the day.”

I knew right away, that Granddad had died. I don’t know how, I just knew! I didn’t press Mam any further. I realised that behind her false smile, how upset *she* must have been at losing her Dad.

He had passed away on 11th of March 1953, at home, aged 68 years. At 11-30 a.m. the next Saturday, following a service at his Church, Platt Lane Methodist, he was buried at Manchester’s Southern Cemetery, without my having had the chance to say ‘goodbye’. Though I have put that right since.

The next time I visited 194 Lloyd St. South, two things had changed.

Against the wall, at the bottom of the stairs, stood one of the house’s most prized pieces of furniture; a Grandfather Clock. This was an excellent example of its type, with several overlapping dials, giving; time, date, day & night, phases of the moon, etc.

The movement was mounted on a long case with barley twist columns either side of the opening glass fronted face. The tall body of the case had a bow topped door, to allow access to the many weights and swinging brass pendulum. My Uncle Vic. used to wind it regularly, using a little brass crank, inserted into each of the three holes in the dial.

It had kept excellent time, until now! Now, it stood, fully wound but silent. I missed that firm, reassuring tick. Immediately, I opened the front and swung the pendulum; the clock began to tick. This, however, lasted only about three minutes before the pendulum once more hung silent.

The clock, I was told, had run down normally, on March 11th, the day my Granddad had died. Uncle Vic. had rewound it, as usual, but to no avail. It had refused to run. Just like the one in the song. ‘*My* Grandfather’s clock’ *had*, ‘stopped - short, never to run again, when the old man died’.

My Father stubbornly refused to accept this, he was no mean amateur watch mender so he cleaned and oiled the movement. Despite everything seeming fine, the escapement still would not sustain its action.

He even had it taken to our local Clock & Watch-menders shop, on the corner of Princess and Mauldeth Roads. They couldn’t get it going either. It really was, - ‘never to run again!’ - The other change was less odd, but in its own way no less dramatic.

It had become fashionable, in the neighbourhood, to have all the doors, fenders and accessories of ‘the range‘, chromium plated. My Nana had wanted to follow suit; Granddad had been dead against it.

Now, with Granddad simply *dead*, my grandmother had accepted an offer from one of the neighbours, who was moving house. Before handing over their keys, they had allowed Nana to swap all the relevant black leaded items from *her* range with their chromed ones.

I walked into the living room, and, Pow! It was awful. Granddad had been right. None of the women though, my Mam included, agreed. All they were concerned with was how easy it would now be to keep clean.

It didn’t really matter, the days at 194 were numbered.

With the Yearsleys out of the frame, and Granddad passed away, 194 was now excess to requirements. Plus, with our rent contribution gone and the loss of Granddad’s pension, a reduction in rent was now a priority. Nana applied for an exchange, to a three bedroom house.

An offer from the town hall came surprisingly quickly, and I found myself being pushed, in my trolley, by my Auntie Clarice, down the road off Lloyd St., which was almost opposite 194.

I’d often looked down it from the bedroom window, or as we passed it by, but this was the first time I’d ever travelled down Thornleigh Road. It was a different world. So near and yet so far.

Just a few hundred yards from my ex-home, we turned right into Marbury Avenue. An avenue! A road which went nowhere!

After a main road, with busses running by, I thought it was great. It would be even quieter than Stoneacre. It should suit my Nana fine. We turned left onto a long path, which number 7 shared with number 9. Taking a key from her pocket, Clarice opened the door to number 7, and let me go in, first. - First in, last out!

I wanted to cry. The house was empty of furniture, but that wasn’t the problem. It wasn’t just that it was empty, it looked derelict.

There were only two rooms downstairs, living room and kitchen, plus toilet, pantry and coal-place. The lino and oilcloth were ripped and holed, and all the paintwork, both on woodwork and walls, was green and brown. As if this were not bad enough, the paint on the woodwork was crazed all over. It transpired that the previous occupant had at some time, mixed together two types of paint, which reacted with one another. It would all, eventually, need to be burnt off.

The gardens, however, were huge. I thought this was great too, though in the event it would be a mixed blessing.

Whilst my Auntie Clarice went from room to room, taking measurements for curtains, etc, I spent the entire time in the empty living room. I sat on the chassis of my folded trolley, and by kicking on the end walls, alternately, propelled myself backwards and forwards, repeatedly, along the length of the room. Once furnished, this would be impossible.

Little did I suspect that in the fullness of time, I would once again be alone in this empty room.

Not long afterwards, I accompanied my Nana, to Manchester Town Hall, to select a new tiled fireplace for the house, and finalise the move. A housing officer, named George Burton dealt with all this.

By some strange twist of fate, this same George Burton lived at number 9 Marbury Avenue. He and my Nana were to be next door neighbours!

On the day of the move, *we* visited, to lend our help. All the recesses of 194 were being turned out, and an ever growing pile of unwanted belongings was being assembled on the pavement, to be picked up by a local ‘rag and bone’ merchant. There were iron bedsteads, and all other manner of household items.

The contents of the ‘glory hole’, the cupboard under the stairs, were there too. Among them were some relics of the war. My Uncle Vic’s. tin helmet, dumbbells and Indian clubs, from his time in the RAF. Plus, an assortment of gas masks.

Number 7 Marbury was a lot smaller than 194. That *was* the idea after all. Such a lot of stuff was going to have to go!

Even with this level of attrition, when the van arrived at the other end, some things just would not fit. The biggest problem was a large, heavy chest.

This had a set of drawers at each end, flanking a double cupboard. A formidable piece of furniture. After a serious discussion with his mother, Uncle Vic. got out his big saw.

Right there, in the back garden where it had been dumped, he sawed it into three.

The cupboard was sacrificed, leaving two, slightly asymmetrical three drawer chests. Even so, room could not be found for the both of them. Only one of them survived. Painted mushroom and fitted with red plastic knobs instead of the original brass handles.

It was going to take some time to adjust.

Black cat ‘Tiddles’, made the trip in a Manchester Corporation Transport, navy blue canvas, money sack, of my Uncle Vic’s. Bewildered, he was then transferred to the locked pantry for several days. It was thought, that as the distance of the move was so short, there was a good chance that he would turn up back at Lloyd Street.

These fears proved unfounded however. Following a short confinement, in the pantry, with buttered paws he was let out to explore his new territory. Unlike some, he never strayed.

**Chapter 24** T.V. Times

Back in Woodhouse Park, there had been some moving going on too. The Galvin’s had moved out of their inside corner house with its big back gardens.

Knowing in advance, that this was going to happen, George Winn had wasted no time in organising the realisation of his dream. Flitting his family, as already described, across the road.

Working for the council had its advantages.

They were replaced at number 18 by the Cross’s, with a son, about my age, Steven. Another member for the gang. Then, the world went crazy!

The ‘powers that be’, had at long last decided that the time had come for The Queen to be officially crowned. Until it was over, we were in the grip of Coronation fever. The talk on the wireless was all about processions, ceremonials, Westminster Abbey, et al. Similar talk abounded in the neighbourhood too. Talk of decorations, of street parties, but most of all, of television sets!

Now, up until this time I had seen only about three television sets. The most frequent sightings being of my Uncle Ernie’s. No one *I* knew, in Woodhouse Park, had one. All this was about to change.

Previously, folk had been content to simply hear about important occasions, via the radio. If they wanted to see them as well, this would have to wait until their next visit to the cinema. Here they would be enlightened by the work of the Pathe or Movitone newsreel cameras.

Now, however, for a price, they would be able to watch the Coronation first hand. It was the shot in the arm, which the fledgling television industry had been waiting for. Very rapidly, almost every house I went into had acquired a set. Every house, that is, except ours! Dad said, ‘*we* couldn’t afford one’.

What actually happened then, seems very odd in retrospect. Everyone began to have TV parties. Families would invite one another round, to watch TV! They’d make a night of it, with drinks and nibbles. Sometimes, even a full-scale meal. The TV dinner had been born!

As we had no set of our own, we found ourselves doing the rounds on Saturday nights.

This usually began at 5 o’-clock, with Children’s Television. The rest of the week, I just used to dump on one of the neighbours, usually the Shaws. I’d simply knock on their door and say, ‘Can I come in and watch telly, please?’ They rarely turned me away.

My favourite show was Whirligig. This Saturday afternoon, children’s, magazine programme, hosted by Humphrey Lestock, was the launch pad for several future star acts.

Charlie Drake was the stooge in a knockabout double act, called Mick and Montmerency. He was Montmerency.

Then there was a mad, bearded, Australian pianist, come artist. He drew a small, spotty, cartoon boy, called Willoughby, on a pad by the piano. The cartoon then ‘came to life’ and joined in the act. I wonder whatever happened to him. His name was Rolf, – something or other.

Folk got very excited as The Coronation drew ever closer. Everyone seemed to go slightly mad. Dad produced, from somewhere, a stack of bunting, a large Union Jack flag, and two, hardboard shields. These were in union jack colours too, and each had three small flags sticking up from behind in the shape of a fan.

Dad made a collapsible staff for the big flag. It was grey, with a red finial. Then, there was just one problem. This lot had to be stuck up, all over the outside of the house, and Dad didn’t like climbing ladders, at all.

Nevertheless, he did, albeit very gingerly; with me dancing up and down the garden, going ‘up a bit, down a bit, etc. Eventually, along with the rest of the street, it looked amazing.

Come the day, the nation watched the whole event on their new sets. Those who didn’t have one either did without or imposed on a long-suffering neighbour. There followed many parties.

Some took place in the streets, which had been unofficially closed to traffic. Ours took place in a local primary school hall, (not Poundswick’s). It was wonderful.

Everyone, old and young alike received a commemorative coronation mug. Ours were put into the cupboard just above the meters, in the hallway. And there they stayed, until one day when I was trying to fish something, from the out of reach cupboard, with the aid of a garden cane. I caught the handle of *my* mug with the cane. It fell to the floor and smashed to bits at my feet.

My only tangible, personal memoir of the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, was gone. Only the memory remains.

Not long after all the festivities were over, the decorations were taken down and everything was back to normal,

Dot. Winn took a cleaning job, at the school where the party had been held, and found out that they had a Boy Scout troupe. Barry and I were asked if we’d like to join the Wolf Cubs. (Cub Scouts) We did. It meant that we could legitimately dress up in silly clothes, and carry sheath knives. I stayed with The ‘1st Woodhouse Park’, until the time came to leave the Cubs and graduate to the Scouts. By then, I had other fish to fry. So chose a different path.

The other thing which happened, following the Coronation, was that Dad gave in, and bought a TV set.

My guess is that the pre-coronation demand had hiked up the prices. Now that they were back to normal, Dad had decided we *could* afford it.

The set, a 12-inch Bush, came from Bourke’s TV Service, on Stretford Road, Old Trafford. The centre one of a row of shops, near White City dog track They and the track too, are more examples of things now consigned to memory in the name of progress.

The set was huge and heavy, in comparison to its screen size. It cost £65, payable over five years. Hire purchase was no stranger to the Yearsley household, but this was the biggest commitment Dad had ever taken on.

Strangely, I have casually observed how over the years since, the price of a 12-inch, black and white TV set remained remarkably stable. Though the cost of everything else had skyrocketed, until they ceased production, a 12-inch, monochrome, portable TV could still be had for around £65.

Initially it stood on top of the Gilbert Gramophone, next to the fireplace. This meant that the gram. could not now be used. But it rarely was anyway.

Several things now occurred.

I reacquired my street cred., which had been dented somewhat of late.

Nana and Clarice, began to visit, virtually every Saturday.

We all began to get square eyes, from constantly watching ‘the box’.

In short, we became a typical ‘new TV’ family. The set was on, from the start of transmission to The Epilogue. And even then we’d watch the dot disappear, in the centre of the screen.

“Come in, sit down, shut up, its on”, became the order of the day. Eventually, the set was given its own smart, new, TV trolley.

The gramophone could once more be used. Not that it ever was. Now, with the TV parked up the corner of the room, one of the armchairs was pushed aside and the set usurped the position formerly held by the fireplace, as the focal point of the living room.

Telly’ had well and truly arrived, and was here to stay.

**Chapter 25** It’s the End for the Cast, but the Play Goes On

The summer holidays were upon us once again, and big changes were once more on the way.

This time, following my six weeks and Dads two weeks off, I would be returning to ‘The Big School’. Barry, on the other hand, would not.

Even though it was joined to the infants, Poundswick Junior School was an entirely separate entity. It had its own Headmistress, own staff, own classroom block, own playground and, as I’ve already said, it’s own hall. The only things it shared with the junior school, were the dining hall and The Caretaker. Mr. Hunter.

It had been rumoured, that lessons would be much harder, that they went swimming, and that naughty pupils ‘got the strap,’ in Big School.

Up until now, it had been pretty much all play, with sand pits, water tables, and the like. Now, it seemed, the play was going to have to stop. But that was six weeks away, and at that age, six weeks is a very long time.

On a happier note, Paul had his plaster cast removed for the last time.

Now would begin the task of strengthening those wasted legs, and teaching him to walk. It was never going to be easy. The oddest thing, was that Mam used to receive a regular medical prescription for Paul. Nothing odd about that, you’ll probably say. But to get this prescription made up, she went, not to the chemists but to the local shoe shop! The prescription was for a series of specially made, built up shoes.

Funny how six weeks can seem such a long time, at the beginning, but such a short time, nearing the end. Mam, though, in common with most of the other parents, made it quite clear that she thought six weeks far too long. It couldn’t come to an end quickly enough for her.

And so, it was with great relief that she delivered me to the junior school gates on the first day of term. I was enrolled into Miss Brownsett’s class.

I needn’t have worried about the difficulty of the lessons. They picked right up, from where infants had left off.

I needn’t have worried about swimming either. I wouldn’t be going, just yet. The strap, however, did exist.

Miss (Gladys) Stevens, the Headmistress, carried the long, three tailed tawse, along with its accompanying punishment book, around with her sometimes, as a deterrent. It worked!

Occasionally though, it did have to be used. We always knew when someone had 'got the strap’. The grapevine never failed.

One rather unusual feature of the school, were the washing facilities in the toilets. Instead of the usual, individual wash hand basins, there were wash fountains!

These were large, round porcelain fountains, topped off with glass, drum shaped, liquid soap dispensers. A chrome foot rail circled the base, just above floor level. When this was pressed, a spray head, just beneath the soap dispenser, jetted water down into the circular basin. It was great.

At playtime there was never any fighting for a sink. A large number of small boys and, presumably, girls too, could all wash at the same time.

There was just one problem. The education authority never supplied any liquid soap. We had to make do with the same, cut down cakes of carbolic, as used in the infants.

The shiny new soap dispensers had their chrome lids removed. The small bars of soap were then simply piled into the glass cylinder. Here, they were very difficult for small children to reach, both to remove and replace. Hence most of them just got dropped into the basin, where they turned into blobs of red mush.

The best laid plans of mice and men, etc.

Lessons included the usual 3 Rs plus PE/sport, with an emphasis on Comprehension Tests. Then there were Art & Craft, and Drama.

The Art lessons seemed to exist solely to provide stock for the twice yearly, Bring and Buy sales. We made; calendars from old Christmas cards, and plaster moulded gnomes, painted and varnished. We did basket and raffia work, and wove woollen school scarves, on neat little looms. And there were the Christmas decorations too. Loads of stuff.

Then, of course, our long-suffering parents were expected to buy it all, in aid of school funds. And buy it they did!

The drama lessons culminated, every year, with each class producing a play or other form of performance.

Over my four years there, I played, Tiny Tim in ‘A Christmas Carol’, the Dormouse in ‘Alice in Wonderland’, and also produced a puppet version of The Three Bears, using the schools marvellous puppet theatre.

For the Dormouse role, Dad painted me a marvellous mask. For the Tiny Tim role, he made me a small crutch, complete with padded rest and rubber tip.

He had more talent than he ever realised. When I delivered the line, ‘God bless us, everyone.’ there wasn’t a dry eye in the house.

The acting didn’t stop at the school gates, either. For a while, I had *my own* puppet theatre, made from a cardboard box. This I used on the front path at number 16, with my audience sitting on the steps.

Not only did I charge for these performances, I sold sweets in the interval too.

Then, over the road at the Winn’s, George Winn had decided on a better use for his coal place. So to hold his coal, he built a wooden bunker, around the back.

A big bunker. A very big bunker! Big and strong enough, in fact, to be used as a stage.

Rigged out with practical, operating curtains, our most ambitious production was an abbreviated version of ‘A Tale of Two Cities’. Complete with working guillotine.

Well, almost working!

It *was* the best of times, but definitely not the worst.

During most of the first year at the juniors, there were no playing fields to use. The place where these would ultimately be, had been used for the builders huts, and to deposit the huge amount of earth excavated from the site. This was simply piled high, in a big, curved hill, or bund. A fence ran along the edge of the playground, so the hill was strictly out of bounds.

Then, one day, two low loaders arrived. One carried a big, yellow bulldozer and the other an even bigger earthmover.

The two were hooked together and the bulldozer then charged repeatedly at the hill. As it rose effortlessly over the top, on its big caterpillar tracks, it pushed some of the earth aside with the dozer blade. Far more earth was then scooped up, by the earthmover, following on behind.

Over a period of almost a week, along with many of the other lads, I took every opportunity to watch our school fields, being levelled by just one man, in charge of a whole lot of very powerful metal.

After fine trimming, with the dozer blade, a big vibro-roller was substituted for the earthmover, and the dozer driver proceeded to roll the area as smooth as a billiard table. Then a small tractor took over.

It raked and seeded the bare, flat earth, which then proceeded to slowly turn green. We had, most of us, seen this happen already, in our own gardens, but not on this scale. We couldn’t wait to get on it.

We weren’t allowed to, for a while, though. The young grass had to be allowed to establish itself, and harden off. Eventually, the small tractor returned, bringing with it a gang mower. Once this had trimmed the rough grass to what looked like smooth green baize, it was all ours.

Up until that time, football had been limited to kicking a soft ball, carefully, around the playground. Similarly, cricket was limited to single runner, with stumps chalked on the school wall. Now, there would be sport aplenty, a bit too much for me, as it turned out. Oh yes, - and gardening.

On the ground floor, all the classrooms ran along the full length of the front of the building. Separated from them, by a corridor, were the toilets, playground doors and cloakrooms.

These were the usual rows of low hooks, below which were wooden benches, over woven wire, shoe lockers. Here were kept our gym pumps, and now also, football boots.

These were nothing like modern boots. They were made of thick, stiff leather, which had to be dubbined to make it subtle. They had steel toecaps, too, which enabled even the most inept boy, to toe-bung the ball the length of the pitch or over the fence into someone’s garden.

Lastly, they had cork studs, hammered into the soles and heels. These wore down quickly, and had to be replaced, often.

Before and after games and PE, we changed our footwear in the cloakroom. Banter prevailed.

It was following just one such games lesson, as we were standing in line, waiting to be let back into class, that someone discovered the exact length of my fuse.

The line ran from the classroom door, under the wall-mounted bell, and past the emergency fire hose reel. I was standing behind Alan Jaques.

As I’ve already mentioned, being small and weedy, I used to get picked on somewhat. I usually just put up with it. Today, however, was going to be different.

I haven’t a clue what Alan Jaques was saying. I just remember him *going on*, and prodding me in the chest with his finger. I snapped! I drew back my right hand, and without any thought as to the consequences, punched him straight in the mouth.

His lip erupted. All of a sudden, the orderly queue disintegrated. Alan Jaques fell onto one of the cloakroom benches, clutching his mouth; blood running from between his fingers.

The rest of the class were now forming a circle around the pair of us, their mouths agape. I fully expected to be hit back, but I wasn’t. I had gained some welcome respect.

Temporarily, at least!

**Chapter 26** The End for Santa

Back home, something odd was going on.

One by one, our neighbours were having their kitchen stoves moved - out of the kitchen and into the washhouse! It was our turn to follow this fashion. Why?

Well I guess the culture change was getting to everyone, and they harked for the way things were. It would be just like 194 Lloyd St. South.

Many folk, it seemed, had grown up living in the kitchen and cooking in the scullery, just like my mam. They just couldn’t get used to using the kitchen, as a kitchen.

A plumber, from the Gas Board, came and disconnected the stove. He removed the connector and capped off the pipe. I watched, enthralled, as he then refitted the connector, via a small length of copper pipe, and a ‘Yorkshire T’ fitting, into the wash boiler gas line, in the washhouse.

With a few wafts of his blowlamp, the solder flowed smoothly round the ends of the fittings. I filed this experience away for later use.

Lugging the heavy stove from the kitchen, he reconnected it and pushed it up to the washhouse wall, just inside the door. Mam was thrilled. I was mystified.

The small washhouse now had even less space, and the kitchen had a ruddy great gap. Why?

Not too long afterwards, we went out and bought a kitchen suite. It comprised a sideboard, table, plus two chairs and two stools. All in matching pine with red Formica tops. The tops of the chairs and stools were in matching red leatherette.

The table-set went in place of the borrowed items, which were returned to my Grandmother’s. The sideboard went in the space vacated by the gas stove, plus the pram.

This item, was now destined to take up precious room, next to the dining table in the living room, for many years after Paul had ceased using it. Thus, the kitchen became a fully fitted dining/morning room, complete with wireless.

Because we would no longer be able to heat the room, using the open oven door, a Valor paraffin heater was acquired. This now consumed copious amounts of that smelly fuel, which had to be lugged, from an ‘Esso Blue’ dispenser in Kershaw’s Hardware shop, in a heavy, one gallon, jerry can.

I suspect, that if it hadn’t been for the telly and the fireplace, that the living room too, would have been, all but, abandoned. Just like the parlour at 194. Now the living room, basically, just became the TV room.

With the added expense of finding the payments for the telly *and* the kitchen furniture, further sources of income had to be explored. Dad was already doing as much as he could, via his piecework and overtime. He’d even taken to cycling to work, with his lunch in an old gas mask bag, to save on bus fares. So, It was down to Mam. She decided on a two pronged attack.

Firstly, she decided to become a mail order catalogue agent. For Kay’s, Brian Mills, and Marshall Ward. It would, she surmised, enable her to obtain goods, for us, at a discount, and make some commission from other folk at the same time.

It didn’t work out that way, of course. The catalogue companies are not philanthropic. It simply put her to a lot of effort and worry, and led us further into debt.

And so, regrettably, it was decided that there was no alternative to her going back to work. She kept the catalogues going, though. Almost everything we bought, for years, came out of them.

We weren’t alone. Living on the drip, drip, drip, of hire purchase, was a way of life to most. To many it still is.

Mam got herself another typing job, for a while, but this meant commuting and the early starts which went with it. Paul was found a baby-minder, near my school. I was dropped off at the Cooke’s every morning, to wait ’till school time, when I would walk the few yards, with Elaine.

When the mornings were dark and cold, we would huddle around the open door of Auntie Elsie’s gas stove, to keep warm. Often, more to relieve the wait than for any other reason, Elaine and I would run errands to the local shops.

I became, what was then referred to as, a ‘latch key kid’. This meant that I carried a key to school, to let myself into the empty house when school let out. This was much frowned upon, by the authorities, and still is.

Often, I would forget my key, or temporarily lose it. In order to cover this situation, I became fully proficient at breaking into the house.

My usual method involved shinning up a rear drainpipe, and forcing open a window into my bedroom. This was one of the small opening lights, not a main window.

I would then slither through, head first, until I could reach down and release a big window. Then, with some difficulty, I had to extricate myself from the small frame, before climbing in through the big one.

Though some of my friends *were* in on this mode of entry, in order to copy it for themselves, my parents never found out.

Mam, eventually, found herself alternate employment, nearer home, in order to reduce our early leaving time. She joined the catering department at the local factory of Ferranti Electronics, where she ran a small sales kiosk attached to the canteen.

My first year at junior school had been in Miss Brownsett’s class. The only things I can remember about her are, that she was the only female teacher I had there, and also, she had a car. A black Morris Minor convertible, with a red soft-top.

During this year, two odd things happened. Miss Brownsett got married. We were told all about it, but to avoid confusion, we were ordered to continue calling her Miss Brownsett. To *avoid* confusion?

And lastly, although I took some convincing, I was disabused, by a fellow pupil, about the tooth fairy and Father Christmas. A seminal moment. I didn’t let on though. I still took the money and the visits to Lewiss’ grotto every year.

The second year wasn’t much more memorable, either. I was in Mr. Gee’s class. He kept a single, white, gym shoe, on the corner of his desk as a constant warning. Boys who misbehaved were picked up, upside down under his left arm, while the right one wielded the shoe.

I was subjected to this indignity a few times. Girls who misbehaved, were sent to the Headmistress. We never found out what happened to them.

When I eventually moved up to secondary school, I discovered that one of my fellow pupils there, was his daughter Anne Gee. On discussing her father, it seemed that he was as tough a disciplinarian at home, as at school. Except, that there, he didn’t just limit his whacking activities to boys.

The only other thing I do remember about this year is that I was off school ill for a fortnight; Wimbledon Fortnight!

For the very first time, I was not sent back to Fallowfield, when sick, but allowed to stay home, alone.

I spent the entire two weeks, lying on the settee, eating baked beans and watching the tennis on telly. Great! I got so into it that I plain forgot about my illness. I still can’t remember what it was.

I wound up, back at school, knowing all the players, the scores, everything. Education, of a sort, I suppose.

**Chapter 27** Life’s a Pain

I always was something of a sickly kid. Constantly suffering from one thing or another, I spent a great deal of my young life, being dragged around doctors and hospitals. Being bled, poked, prodded, and having all manner of inconclusive tests. I got quite used to it.

‘Here we go again’ I’d think, as I was having my tongue depressed and asked to say ‘Ah’, for the umpteenth time. Non of this was ever discussed with me, being a little kid, of course. But I gather that at one time, they even considered whether I might have TB.

I didn’t, happily, but I did continue to display quite a range of symptoms, which would take them some years to fathom out.

Maybe I take after my Dad in this respect. From my very earliest memory, he was not an entirely well man. He always had, or was just going to get, ‘a bottle from the doctor’. Usually this turned out to be some sort of bismuth, in one or other sickly pastel shade, to treat an ulcer and chronic indigestion.

He had problems with his feet, too. Which made it necessary to put arrowroot powder in his socks, sometimes. Then, he had the problem which had kept him out of the armed services. A punctured eardrum.

I have only recently discovered that Frank Sinatra was also barred from military service for precisely the same reason!

Nowadays doctors do this to people deliberately, to treat ‘glue ear’ and allow it to drain. Then, however, it was thought a very bad thing. Yes, he did have to keep a wad of cotton wool in it a lot of the time, because it did drain. But the upside was his party piece; blowing cigarette smoke, out of his ear.

This leads me to another point. Dad smoked like a chimney. Nothing strange about that, then, though, many people did. Everyone in my family, with the exception of my Nana, in fact.

It was a family joke, that wherever I sat, in relation to other people, their smoke would always drift my way. They got quite a laugh out of my waving my hands about, trying to disperse it. No one considered even primary inhalation harmful, back then, let alone secondary, they just told me not to be silly.

Not surprisingly, perhaps, Dad had a dreadful, bronchial cough. It was so bad, that George Winn used to joke, ‘You can always tell when Charlie’s coming. You can hear his coughing half a mile away’. Joke it may have been, sadly it was true. I now have precisely the same cough, and I’ve never smoked a cigarette in my life!

Around the time when I was nine or ten, Dad suffered a punctured lung. I’ve no idea how. He was very poorly for a while, and the redundant dining table was removed, upstairs; a single bed being set up in its place.

He was confined to the living room, for some time.

Dad moved around, from time to time, in his work, usually being laid off, due to the changing fortunes of his employers. Most of the latter part of his career, however, was spent at one company; The Switchgear & Cowan electrical engineering company, in Altrincham, Cheshire.

Mostly his activities were confined to a bay on the factory floor. But occasionally, he would be sent out on site, to assist with an installation.

Two of these are worthy of note. The second involved his staying away from home for a couple of weeks. The first didn’t.

He told me that he had been involved in an unusual job, at the factory. This involved the manufacture of some long sections of perfectly curved, metal channel. This had a rectangular, external section, but a semicircular internal one. Dad’s job was to weld these together, face to face, very accurately. This made a whole series of curved tubes, square on the outside, but with a circular, internal cabling duct. They were for the big radio telescope dish at Jodrell Bank. He got to go to Goosetree, to help install them.

More important, probably, is the fortnight he spent, on a job at Seascales nuclear power plant. Now famous, or infamous to the world at large, as Sellafield.

I don’t know what the job was, it was secret. I do, however, remember well, how he told me about the radiation leak!

He was quite nonplussed as he recounted how he and many others had been made to strip and hand in all their tools. And, how they had been put through decontamination. He was quite matter of fact about it all. They had been assured that they were in no danger.

He was, however, very angry about the fate of the tools.

He explained how these had been gathered up, by staff in radiation suits, and sealed in containers, to be dumped at sea.

‘Everything from overalls to brand new welding sets’, he said, naively.

‘Completely pots for rags. *(his term for stupid or daft)* There was nothing wrong with them. It’s a crime’. He may have been right but not in the way he meant!

Many years later, he was diagnosed with colon cancer, which indirectly led to his death. It may well have had nothing at all to do with the above incident but, then again… Who knows?

What of *my* persistent symptoms? The blinding headaches, plus catching everything going. Well, some doctor finally held up a finger to the wind, and took a wild stab. ‘It could be his tonsils’, my Mother was told.

Advised that my having these removed, along with my adenoids, would probably, ‘make a new boy’, of me. She agreed.

A short spell in Wythenshawe hospital later, I emerged, minus mucus membranes. I was not ‘a new boy’. The symptoms continued, unabated.

Stu’s bugs one. NHS nil!

Not, as it happens, my last visit to Wythenshawe hospital either. But that was for an unconnected reason.

The next time a doctor had a stab in the dark, towards improving my lot, My Mother was told, ‘It could be eye strain, from watching television. Have his eyes tested.’

She made me an appointment that very day, with the family’s opticians, Berry’s, on Claremont Road, outside Maine Road Football Ground. Duly tested, I was prescribed the very lowest power, reading lenses. I didn’t really need them, but I became a ‘specky four eyes’, anyway. In National Health, goggle glasses.

Score now, two - nil.

Eventually, I was diagnosed as suffering from acute migraine. Though, only when the full-blown symptoms made themselves obvious and I was being laid, well and truly, low by them.

I was given a permanent prescription, for some tiny, sugar-coated pills. At the first sign of an attack, I had to take to my bed, with the curtains drawn, and allow these things to dissolve under my tongue.

Success! Blessed relief, at long last. I had my last attack around my twentieth birthday. Fifty years ago, touch wood. -

Two – one!

**Chapter 28** The Party, Coming to the Aid of the Party

One day, I can’t remember exactly when, The Mixer vanished!

No one I spoke to had seen it go or even witnessed any preparatory activity. One day, it was there. The next, it was simply, gone! Even the Winns, who could see it directly, from their rear windows, saw nothing.

It was the end of an era. The Mixer had been an icon for the estate. Every one took their bearings from it. What would life be like without it?

There were various rumours concerning its fate. Some said it had been taken to another estate, down south. Some said, it had gone to Germany. Then there were others, who said that it had been built for just that one massive job and, that done, it had gone to be scrapped.

That, couldn’t be borne thinking about. All that remained was yet another cleared, croft. And folk now had to remember to pay their bus fares to; Minsterley Parade, instead.

Eventually this croft was to become the site of our first local pub. The Cock O’ the North. When built, it would be directly opposite, the already mentioned, St. Mark’s Church.

Funny how the planners like to site pubs and churches adjacent.

Many years later, in leaner times, the name was changed to ‘The Talisman’ in an attempt to revitalise business. It didn’t work and the pub was demolished at the end of 2012, leaving another site once more to be occupied by housing.

Anyway, in the meantime, another saviour came to the aid of the drinking man; this, in the shape of the local Labour Party. On a big croft, a block to the rear of the shops, now rose, Woodhouse Park Labour Club.

Politics *had* reared its head, in the Yearsley household, from time to time. Dad, like his father, sisters and brothers in law, (but not brother) were firmly convinced of the workers oppression by the ruling classes. And so, were just as firmly, behind the Labour Party and all it stood for. Equality.

Mam, on the other hand, like all the Peggs, had been totally influenced by Winston Churchill, during World War II. Consequently, she was a ‘true blue’ Conservative.

Every election, they would, on principle, go down to the local school and cancel out one another’s votes. It would have been far easier to come to an agreement, that both stay home. But no, they had to exercise their franchise.

I well remember a heated argument, which took place in Liverpool, between my Auntie Francis, and a neighbour. Fran., as I’ve just mentioned, was staunch Labour. The neighbour, was not.

Francis had been to vote, and on returning home, kept an eye out, to see if her neighbour would do like wise. If the neighbour did not go down to the polling station then Fran. considered that her vote had counted. If, on the other hand, the neighbour went also, then Fran. considered, that her whole effort had been wasted. She took it very personally.

The neighbour went.

The argument which resulted, took the form of a very heated, doorstep exchange. No quarter asked, non given. It went on until one of them ran out of words to sling, and turned and slammed the door. The other then followed suit. Bang! Bang!

Then, inside the Allen’s, a one sided tirade continued. All present, including me, being forced to listen to the argument, over and over again, until Auntie Francis calmed down. Ah, democracy at work!

Woodhouse Park Labour Club was no different from thousands of other working men’s clubs throughout the land. It had its concert room, with stage, dance floor and rows of Formica topped, wooden tables, surrounded by a forest of matching wall seats and stools.

Then there was the games room, with its snooker and domino tables, dartboards, slot machines and, most importantly, bar. The socialist principal of all men being equal, was spoiled a tad by just the one thing.

Hidden away, behind the games room bar, was the Member’s Bar. Committee members, that is. Concealed behind an anonymous door, was a sumptuously decorated room for the elite. Entry to outsiders was by invitation only. Many of the regulars, who paid for it all with their subs., probably never knew of its existence. Some men were clearly more equal than others.

My parents began to attend the club regularly, most Saturday nights. I was left to make tea, for myself and Paul. Always salad sandwiches, with lashings of salad cream.

On Sunday lunch times, we, along with some of our neighbour’s kids, were also taken along to The Club.

We were quite happy to be treated to lemonade and crisps, watch the adults play Housey Housey, (Bingo), and listen to the two piece band, of organ and drums.

So popular did the place become, that it was soon necessary to double the concert room in size. The job was given to a local firm who specialised in concrete, prefabricated, domestic garages, Kenkast. They were well known at that time, but have now been ceased trading, for many years.

They tore out the stage and end wall, and added, what was really just a large version of one of their garages. A big concrete shed. Externally, it looked most odd. Internally, when the room was redecorated, this didn’t show. Besides, it was relatively cheap.

The resulting hall was impressively big, but the large attendances didn’t last.

Not many years later, in order to bring the action on the stage, nearer to the audience at the back of the room, a long run-out was added. This ran from the stage, across the dance floor, and back to the position where the original stage had been.

‘The Club’ soon became Dads second home, as also of many of his friends. Years later, it was to be his undoing.

He spent too much time there. He spent too much money there. And eventually, my Mother was to meet the man who she would leave him for, there.

For the moment, though, the major effect it had, was to make all further trips to the pubs at the airport, unnecessary.

I missed those trips. I missed them a lot.

**Chapter 29** Things Going Swimmingly

Compared to the first two years at junior school, my third, in Mr. Allsop’s class, was a whole different ball game. The first, and most obvious difference, was this:

The pupil intake to the school had far exceeded the planner’s expectations. The hall had already been pressed into use as a temporary classroom. Now, this had been tackled by building two prefabricated classrooms, on the grass at the right hand side of the school building.

These were made of wood, painted grey, and had windows running the length of the school facing side. The rear of these two rooms was allocated to Mr. Allsop.

In retrospect, we who were consigned to these ‘sheds’, ought to have felt rejected. Not so. Being in the prefabs, was something new and as such, exciting.

They were connected to mains electricity, of course, but not the school heating system. There were no big, warm radiators, to lean on. To stop these thin walled buildings becoming extremely cold in winter, a large, cast iron, solid fuel, heating stove, stood in the corner of each room, on a concrete slab.

These were only to be lit and fed by adults, of course. But, the coke, with which to feed them, was kept in a bunker outside. From there it was transported inside, by the ‘coke monitor’, with a shovel and scuttle. A much envied position.

In Mr. Allsop’s class, we would be doing several new things, plus, there would be increased emphasis on the ever-nearing eleven-plus exam., and all which that entailed. Immediately, we were told that we would soon be going swimming.

This was something, which I had been both looking forward to and dreading, at the same time.

Mr. Allsop described to us, in the greatest detail, where we would be going and what we would have to do.

This entailed him doing a complex, and very funny, mime of exactly how to get dried and dressed following a swimming lesson.

He explained, with actions, just how important it was to dry our hair, our backs, and all the nooks and crannies, without in any way being rude or giving offence.

Quite a performance.

Come the day, and classes three and four all turned up carrying rolled up towels, containing swimming trunks or costumes.

We boarded two, red, corporation, double-decker busses, were told to sit down and keep still, and we were off. To,? We didn’t know where!

The busses took a route, which I knew very well. Back towards Fallowfield. They passed near to where my Nana lived, and continued on, to High Street, next to Manchester Royal Infirmary.

High Street was later renamed, Hathersage Road. So we all had to try to call the pool, Hathersage Road Baths. This just didn’t have the same ring to it, however, so we just continued to use the original name.

High Street, or Victoria Baths, to give it it’s correct name, is a beautiful example of over ornate, Victorian architecture. A vision in two tone orange tile, with finely moulded detailing.

Today it still stands. Following many years empty, boarded up and decaying slowly, it became the winner of a TV, ’Restoration’ competition As a listed building, they couldn’t pull it down, so now, thanks to TV, it is slowly being restored and found alternative uses.

The roadway, where the busses used to park, was for many years the driveway into the local Norweb HQ building which I visited, often through my work. I therefore got ample opportunity to study the old baths, and to reflect upon its former glory and the fun I had there. The Norweb HQ also currently stands derelict and unloved, since the acquisition of Norweb, by United Utilities, and subsequent resale as Electricity North West. That driveway and car-park has been sold for housing and now contains blocks of flats.

Three flights of steps lead up to the doorways, which pierce the façade of Victoria Baths. Males, 1st and 2nd class and Females. No mixed bathing here then! The whole place was divided into two, with identical facilities for either sex. Turnstiles, Turkish baths, steam rooms, massage, and of course, the plunge baths. There were even regular, domestic type baths, in cubicles, for those who didn’t have a bath at home. Fantastic!

The pools were twenty-five yards long, with concrete steps in each corner and a hand rail all around. Along the short wall, at the entrance end, were two, long, narrow raised, concrete and tile; hot tubs, in which to wash before entering the pool.

Along the two long sides were the changing cubicles. These had a half door, which went from a foot above the floor, to about four feet. A sliding, green curtain closed the gap at the top.

Inside, a plank seat and a duck-board. This left the short side of the room, down at the deep end.

Here, there was a small set of spectator terraces, for use during competitions. We were herded, two at a time, into the cubicles.

Having been well drilled, by Mr. Allsop, the lads were soon all changed into trunks and parading slowly, so as not to slip, towards the hot tubs. Following a quick scrub and rinse, with the ever-present carbolic soap, we were lined up at the shallow end, and handed over to the tender mercies of the swimming teacher, Mr. Cosgrove.

Mr. Cosgrove proceeded to talk, very loudly, and to blow the whistle which hung around his neck.

Each sound being amplified and reverberated by the acoustic of the building.

The talk covered all the essential safety rules and advice. We were also told what to do and what not to do. This was essentially very simple.

What we had to do, was everything which Mr. Cosgrove told us to do. What we had not to do, was absolutely anything else!

It turned out, that Mr. Cosgrove was a great bloke; a good teacher. Though, there persisted the rumour that he, himself, could not swim.

What he had done, was to firmly establish his authority, in a way which left nobody in any doubt just who was in charge - right from the word go. Like I said, a good teacher. If anyone were to get hurt, and some did, Mr. Cosgrove took it very personally.

He then divided the line into two, right and left, and on his whistle, had each half, slowly file down the shallow end steps and into the water. Here we were to line up, holding tight to the handrail.

The three feet of water came up to my chest. I’d never felt the effects of being in ‘deep’ water before. It was hard to stand, it was hard to move, and what’s more, it was freezing cold. After the warmth of the hot tub, I began to shiver violently. I didn’t like it, in a big way!

I panicked, and tried to get out.

Despite the jeers from my fellows, Mr. Cosgrove must have come across hundreds like me before. He would not let me out of the water. But he did let me sit on the very top step, for a while.

From here, he came back from time to time, and encouraged me to first, kick my legs, then descend slowly, a step at a time, until my feet were on the bottom. He did his damnedest to ensure that I would lose enough of my fear, to willingly return the following week. It worked.

Following the session, we were made to shower, then dry and dress ourselves as best we could. Mr. Allsop’s mime had not prepared us for the fact that it was difficult to put socks on, for example, with feet not quite fully dry.

Some were taking a long time about it, and had to be encouraged by Mr. Allsop or Mr. Cosgrove, who stuck their heads through the cubicle curtains and told them to ‘get a move on’.

Then, filing out we rejoined the girls on the pavement, and boarded the busses for the trip back to school.

Thanks to Mr. Cosgrove, and one or two others, I came to love being in the water, and became a reasonable swimmer. Though, because of a basic lack of stamina, which I have never overcome, I was never to become totally proficient.

I have visited the Victoria Baths several times during its restoration phase. But without the sounds of splashing, the reflections of the water on the walls and ceilings, and the strong smell of chlorine in the air, no-one visiting the building today or in the future will ever be able to appreciate it for what it was.

When I go, I feel like a ghost wandering among the other visitors.

Part glad, part sad, I really do wish that they had knocked it down and preserved just the memory.

Because in preserving the building, for me at least, those memories have been almost destroyed.

I have attended evening concerts there, in the central of the two pools. It is permanently floored over, as it often always was, to provide a dance floor or exhibition space. The pool where I first set foot in the water, is presented now as a faux beach, with sand and shallow water, down at the deep end, to paddle in.

A museum, of sorts, then? A fitting re-use of the building?

Maybe, but not for me.

**Chapter 30** Making a Clean Sweep

Being a ‘Latch Key Kid’, I not only let myself into the house at four-o-clock every weekday afternoon but I began to take on other tasks as well. The most important of these, during the cold weather, was laying the coal fire.

I had been well schooled in the importance of good preparation. So, following removing the un-burnt coals, from the night before and taking out the ashes, I laid a bed of tightly knotted newspaper balls, using the previous night’s Manchester Evening News.

These were topped off with a layer of kindling. Dad used to bring this home from work, either in neat tied bundles or as larger pieces of scrap wood, which he would chop up with a hatchet. This hatchet did not begin life as such. Oh no! That would have cost money. Resourceful as ever, he had made it, at work, by heating, beating out and grinding sharp, an old 2lb. Hammer. I still have it today.

The bed thus laid was covered carefully, with a layer of selected coals of various sizes, topped off with highly flammable coal-dust. I then applied a match to the protruding ends of the paper balls, and waited for the kindling to ignite. Then, the coup de gras.

The blower!

I had often watched Dad produce a forced draft, to raise the temperatures needed to guarantee ignition of the coal. What he did, was to balance the coal shovel on the edge of the fire basket, face out. Then place over this, a double page of broad-sheet newspaper, thus completely covering the fire hole.

The draft from the chimney would then hold the paper firmly in place and very soon the fire would be roaring. The knack was, not to remove the paper too soon, or the whole thing would die before your eyes, and require completely re-laying.

Conversely, the penalty for removing the paper slightly too late was potentially far more catastrophic. The paper would reach the point of spontaneous combustion, and disappear, in burning chunks, up the chimney.

Twice, in this way, I set the chimney on fire; happily without serious consequence. Dad took two steps to see that this would not reoccur. Firstly, he made a, purpose built blower, at work, from sheet steel. And he regularly thereafter had the chimney swept.

I had vague recollections of seeing the chimney swept at Lloyd Street, but I had been very small. Now, however, I was old enough to watch carefully, everything that was going on. And possibly even help?

The sweep arrived, on a bicycle. With his brushes tied to the crossbar and a pile of folded cloths over the rear wheel. I felt somehow let down. I had expected him to arrive, at least, pushing a hand-cart like the rag and bone men. Or even in a van. But no, I would have to make do with a sweep on a bike. I was told, not to get in the way. Me?

He commenced by pushing back the suite and removing the clock and ornaments from the mantelpiece. Then, with the grate completely removed, he covered the hearth and area around it with a dust-sheet. A second sheet was placed right over the fireplace, held in place by weights on the mantelpiece. This sheet had a peculiar cloth funnel, sewn into its centre.

Untying his bundle of brushes, he laid out the extension rods by his feet. Then, taking one and the big round brush-head, he turned back to the fireplace. Holding the brush-head out of sight, behind the cloth, with his left hand, he inserted the rod through the cloth funnel, with his right, and screwed them both together.

With a great deal of effort, he rammed the brush-head up into the chimney. He turned to pick up the next rod…. I was holding it out to him. This seemed to unnerve him for some reason. He told me that it was alright for me to watch, but that I should stand further back. I did, for a while.

He screwed the second rod onto the first and with continuing struggle, wrestled that up the chimney too. He turned for a third rod…. I was holding it out to him. He asked me if I’d like a special job and I said that I would.

He then told me, that instead of just adding all the rods, it would save him a lot of work, if I would go and stand in the front garden and watch for the brush coming out of the chimney. I was suckered.

I now know that this is completely unnecessary, except, that is, for getting small boys out from under your feet. It worked like a charm.

The huge amount of soot which fell down behind the sheet, as the sweep retrieved his brush, was given to Dad in two canvas sacks. To spread on the garden, the sweep said. I reckoned that this was just to save him the job of disposing of it. Though, I do admit, it would have been rather difficult to take away on a bike.

The next time we had the sweep round, he did come pushing a handcart. And so was able to take away the soot. The time after that, he had promoted himself to a small, battered van. Life was obviously good for a chimney sweep in pre-smokeless Woodhouse Park. It wasn’t to last.

Oh, I’ve just remembered. One final piece of modernisation took all the art out of laying and lighting a fire. Dad had a gas-poker fitted.

No need, any more, for paper balls, chopped kindling or the blower. Just light the poker, and stick it into the coal.

Easy peasy. And much, much safer.

**Chapter 31** The Down Side of Gardening

The designers of Poundswick County Primary School had something in common with those of Havely Hey. They too felt it important that pupils should not be forever shut inside closed classrooms. Their approach, however, was totally different.

Set into the school’s front lawn were patio sized areas of paving. These were the outdoor classrooms. Set at jaunty angles and connected to the main paths by narrow, meandering pathways of their own, it was obviously intended that in good weather, all the basic desks and chairs should be carried outside and classes continue as normal, but in the open air. Insane!

Up until my joining Mr. Allsop’s class, in the prefab, these outdoor classrooms had never been used. This was now to change. Mr. Allsop was clearly determined that none of the provided facilities would go to waste.

And so it was that one fine day we found ourselves trouping outside, carrying our chairs, for an art lesson. We were allowed to sit facing anyway we chose, and to draw whatever was in front of us. Inspired!

The light was great, and with a myriad of subjects to go at, the only down side was the sea of faces pressed against the insides of the windows in the main classroom block. Our fellow pupils were wasting no time in taking the mickey out of us, sitting like a load of lemons, in the middle of the grass.

We ignored the face-pulling and glass tapping, and got on with our drawings. I figured they were just jealous, and on subsequent occasions this seemed borne out, when we were joined by others, on the adjacent outdoor classrooms.

Another facility that had thus-far remained unused, was an area of the rear field, just behind the kitchen. This had been set aside, for use by the pupils, as a garden. There existed a stock of brand new, unused, child-sized garden tools. Mr. Allsop had these brought out of hiding and unwrapped.

Beginning, as always, with basic tool safety, we were taught everything necessary to create a very successful kitchen garden.

Potatoes were the most abundant crop, with carrots and peas close behind. The results actually went into the school kitchen in order to keep down costs. And so we got to eat the results of our own efforts.

The downside to the gardening lessons, was that the biggest and fastest kids always got the favourite tools. The spades.

Digging, even double digging, was much preferred over raking and hoeing. Plus, spades were the easiest to clean, for the tools had to be returned to the store spotless. No prizes for guessing that I usually wound up on the handle end of a hoe.

Following on from the success of the vegetable plot, it was decided to let us loose on the school flowerbeds too; augmenting the sporadic visits by the men from the Council Parks Department.

This work consisted almost entirely of hoeing and weeding. Something for which I, among other small, slow irks, was by now especially qualified.

One dry, bright day the following year, March 14th 1957, we were enjoying ourselves, working on the bed which ran along the front wall of the building.

Hoeing, raking, weeding and, of course, chewing the fat. This wasn’t work, it was fun.

Our conversation was only punctuated by the occasional roar of aircraft engines at full throttle, as a plane took off from the airport, and rose into the lightly clouded sky. Other aircraft, from time to time, came in on their landing approach.

These were much quieter, of course. The roar of reverse thrust not beginning until the aircraft itself had vanished below the rooflines of the surrounding houses of Woodhouse Park.

These comings and goings were by now as familiar as everything else which made up day to day life. The arrivals and departures no longer rated comment but still, we were not that blasé that we didn’t look up and watch.

Then, as I was hoeing and weeding, as usual, something happened which broke the routine.

A BEA Viscount approached from our left, just as many had before it. This time, however, the airliner’s disappearance below the roofline was not followed by the distinctive drone of it’s four Rolls Royce Dart turbo-props being thrown into reverse thrust. Instead, there was a rumble like distant thunder, followed by the appearance of a pall of black smoke rising above the roofs.

The Viscount had failed to make the runway by just a few hundred yards, and crashed into the houses on Shadowmoss Road. Houses just like the ones in which myself and my school-friends lived.

Gardening wasn’t the only lesson we were taught that period. That was the first of Manchester Airport’s only two, actual post war crashes.

The second was in Stockport, just a few hundred yards down Hillgate from where I worked for the last twenty two years up to my retirement.

There *has* been a further accident since, but that was to an aircraft on the ground.

**Chapter 32** Holidays on Wheels,

but Going Nowhere

My Uncle Ernie and Auntie Agnes bought a caravan.

They came round especially to tell us. I gather that they had also visited the Allen’s, in Liverpool, to tell them too. I guess they were excited.

We were invited to go and see it sometime. Stay the weekend, maybe? Since they would have to take us and bring us back, there was nothing to lose.

Mam, begrudgingly, agreed.

I don’t remember where the site was, other than that it was an inland one, rather than at the coast.

The caravan was an old, second-hand, six berth tourer. But in good condition, nontheless.

The site boasted very few late model vans. The bulk having faded paint-work, flat tyres, and the wheels and hitch almost totally buried in long grass. I thought it was great!

All the vans on the site were tourers, of various sizes. Static vans hadn’t been invented yet. Despite being tourers, almost all had been delivered there new, and would spend their whole lives there. Ernie had bought his van on site, and would eventually sell it there too, without it turning a wheel.

We did see one genuine tourer turn up while we were there. A Robin. I watched, enthralled, with Dad, as it was pitched. Dad gave a running commentary throughout the leg lowering and levelling operation. Telling me how you could get a good idea if the van was perfectly level, by how well the door closed. Like he would know?

Strangely, despite the fact that he had never been near a caravan before that weekend, he was absolutely right. He often was.

The weekend was a great success, though I did detect a little strain, from Mam’s direction. We were taken for a ride in the country, with lunch thrown in, and back at the camp, were introduced to many of the site’s regulars.

The strangest quarters, which is why it sticks in my memory, was not a caravan at all. Two brothers had bought a redundant body from a large motor van, and fitted it out with windows, beds, cooker, sink, etc.

It had no wheels. It just sat there, on blocks, like a large white brick, among the streamlined caravans. They had even retained the use of the large double doors in one end. This meant that going in and out exposed the complete interior to the weather. Luckily, the weather that day was fine.

That weekend was to have great repercussions. We were hooked! Though I’m not convinced about Mam. And so too, on a similar weekend for Ernie’s sister and family, were the Allens.

From that time, for the lot of us, it was to be almost exclusively caravan holidays from then on. Great!

The Allens settled on Rainford’s Camp, in Gronnant, Prestatyn, North Wales, as their base. We were persuaded to join them. Dad thought that Rainford’s was a bit expensive, so he chose instead, the adjacent, but less salubrious camp, The Warren, which ran along a narrow strip of land behind the sand-hills.

Although this camp was virtually on the beach, this amenity was not capitalised upon until many years later. Bought up by the Rank Organisation, and turned into the Haven camp, ‘Presthaven Sands’, it was, for many years, the biggest and best in the area.

We spent much of the time with the Allen’s, on Rainford’s. This camp had everything The Warren didn’t. Café, shop, cycle hire and amusement arcade. Even the toilet facilities were better. Err just!

On The Warren, each caravan had an accompanying little hut next to it, containing a chemical toilet, complete with spade. On Rainford’s, however, this wasn’t the case. Instead, there was a large, central, latrine. This wasn’t just a hole in the ground though. Oh no. This was a latrine I still find difficult to believe.

Above ground, it looked just like a regular toilet block . Below ground, it was something different altogether. Looking down, through the wooden seats, revealed a large, deep, underground room. This was fully lit and contained attendants with large brooms. Sweeping everything into piles for removal.

If anyone were to have fallen through, they would have been severely hurt. But would anyone have gone to their aid?

The four cousins, Me, Paul, Brian and Ian, had a fifth friend with which to play. The Allen’s large, white dog, Snowy. Together we had the times of our lives. Running through tall ferns, through the fields and over the hills. The Allens were to go back, again and again. Eventually buying the caravan which they had rented so many times. In the end they became part of the Rainford family; literally. Ian grew up and married the owner’s daughter, Shirley.

We, on the other hand, went back to Gronnant only every two years or so. There was somewhere else which kept calling Dad back. Ever since working there, for The Railway, he had had a special fondness for Morecambe.

In Morecambe, we always stayed on Jackson’s Caravan Camp; sited on the outskirts of the town, opposite the gasworks.

The Jackson’s were a wealthy family, not just owning the camp, but as the owners of the Lunedale Caravan Co., they were also the makers of half of the vans sited on it. The biggest of these was the Jackson’s own, in which they lived on site.

This custom made caravan was the biggest I’d ever seen. It was, in fact, several separate vehicles, clamped together. Each with its own chassis and wheels.

Jackson’s was in a different league to The Warren, or even Rainford’s. The rents only being kept down due to its distance from the beach. It was here that I was taught how to ride a bicycle.

I pestered Dad to teach me, so that I could ride the hire cycles. So, in the long grass, on a field beside the camp, I proceeded to systematically wreck several of Jackson’s tatty, red and black painted bikes.

Dad would run along behind, half pushing, half stabilising me, until he decided to let go. Then, crash! Crash, crash. Over and over again. Each time with me launching myself clear, into the long grass.

Eventually though, I didn’t fall off. I did wobble a lot, but I stayed on. After that I was allowed to ride around the roads of the site.

Wherever we were, the morning routine was always the same. Dad, Paul and me, got up, got dressed, and went out. This, to allow Mam to have a lie-in, attend to her ablutions, and do the breakfast.

When in Morecambe, Dad walked us down through the town, buying a paper along the way, and on to the beach. Here we might kick a ball, fly a kite, or often just walk along and talk.

It was on one such walk that I recalled something Dad had said, whilst watching TV, at home.

We had been watching Morecambe and Wise, Dads favourite comic act, when he volunteered the following piece of information.

“Morecambe’s not his real name, you know. He’s really called Eric Bartholomew, but he chose the simpler, stage name, of Morecambe, because that’s where he’s from and people would remember it easier.”

“How do you know that Dad.” Said I.

“Well.” he replied, “When I was living in Morecambe, working for The Railway, they put me in *digs*. It turned out to be Eric’s auntie’s. I met him many times, and he’s a very nice man.”

At the time, I hadn’t given this much thought. I probably considered the tale to be, just one of those things, which grown-ups say, to impress children. I hadn’t really believed him. Now, however, down on the beach, it all came back.

“What shall we do today then?” He said, as he always did.

“Dad.” I said. “Didn’t you once say that you used to live around here? And you stayed with Eric Morecambe’s auntie?”

“Yes.” He replied. “That’s right.”

“Well,” Says I, “why don’t we go and visit her?”

He looked embarrassed, and I almost wished I hadn’t made such a stupid suggestion. “It was a very long time ago.” He said. “She’s most likely moved. Or she may even have died.”

“Yes.” I continued, too young and stupid to let it go. “But she might not have. And if she is still there, I’m sure she’d like to see you again. Can we go Dad? Can we? Would you remember where it is?”

“Oh yes. I’ll never forget how to get there.” He said. “We *can* go, if you really want to. But your Mother will have to agree first. If she says ‘No’, then that’s the end of it.”

But Mam didn’t say ‘No’, She said ‘OK’.

That afternoon, we boarded a bus for the northern end of the town. Dad led us into a nice, unassuming, housing area, and without missing a step, down a certain street and up a certain garden path. Only then did he hesitate, before knocking on the door. Shortly, it was answered. A pleasant looking, middle aged woman stood in the doorway. Dad called her by name.

She stood there, a puzzled expression on her face, for about six seconds. Then dawning broke, and it was replaced by an enormous smile.

“Charlie!” She exclaimed. And threw herself into his arms.

We were welcomed in, and spent an hour or so there. Dad and his ex-landlady, talking old times. Mam being polite, but feeling obviously out of place.

So, my Dad did know Eric Morecambe. Had known him quite well, in fact. And I hadn’t believed him. I tried never to doubt him again.

‘*Sorry Dad!’*

**Chapter 33** Not So Plane Sailing

In the absence of modern technology, we kids weren’t short of things to keep us occupied. Street games were very popular. All the usual stuff, of course. ‘Ticky It’ (tag), ‘Whip & Top‘, ‘Stick & Hoop‘, ‘Allys’ (marbles), ‘Black & White Rabbit’ (knock a door, run) and, in season, ‘Conkers‘. This was just such a season.

Whoever had laid out Woodhouse Park estate, had done so with some sympathy. Many of the mature trees had been saved. This had been done by punctuating the roadways and housing with frequent ‘pedestrian walks’. Some larger than others, but all having grass verges, and trees.

Just such a ‘walk’ bordered one side of our block. The side which was adjacent to the Infant School. Several of its trees were Horse-Chestnuts.

One day, when the time was right, three of us were scrumping for conkers. We were climbing a tree which overhung the school fence. I was in the lower branches, I didn’t have a head for heights then. Barry Winn was about halfway up, swinging from bough to bough by his arms.

He had enough bottle, and strength, to swing for extended periods by only one hand. As he did so he would use his other hand to pretend scratching his armpit, like a chimpanzee. At the same time, aping (*sorry*) the ‘eek eek’ noises made by Tarzan’s ‘Cheeta’, in the movies.

Way up at the very top of the tree, about thirty five feet above the ground, was another friend of ours, Dave, who lived on the walk, opposite the school gate. Right now, however, he stood on one of the thinnest, topmost branches, holding the slender trunk with one hand, and looking for all the world as if he were waiting for a bus.

Gazing down at us, in the lower branches, Dave started the tree swaying, a lot. Barry’s telling him not to be stupid and my hanging on for dear life, simply caused him to laugh like a drain. Until, that is, something began to happen which, temporarily, distracted all our attentions.

A lad came out of one of the houses, accompanied by an adult, presumably his Dad, who carried a small model aeroplane.

They walked over to the school fence, where the plane was placed on the grass. The lad was then helped over the fence by his Dad, who then handed him the model, and climbed over to join him.

We were dumbstruck. School property was strictly out of bounds, and here was an adult breaking in. As cool as you please they walked onto the centre of the playground.

The model was a small, balsa wood bi-plane, covered in transparent tissue paper. The rubber motor, clearly visible, was wound up by turning the propeller and then it was hand launched. It flew perfectly, ascending in circles to approximately the height of the tree.

When the elastic ran out, it glided down in similar circles, to land on the playground. A greaser every time. I was entranced, all thoughts of conkers forgotten……… I wanted one!

Back home, I told my Dad about the plane, and asked if I might have one. Wisely, he tried to dissuade me, I was having none of it.

He tried another tack. It seemed that he had a work colleague, Norman, who, along with his son, built and flew model aircraft. If I’d like, we could go and see him. Did I ever like? He took me the following weekend.

Norman lived close to my Nanas, on Mauldeth road, between its junctions with Princess Road and Nell Lane. He showed me several models. They all had several things in common.

They were big, they were complicated, and they all had engines on the front. It was explained to me just how difficult they were to build and fly. I agreed, they would be. Then I was told, that if I felt the same way in a few years time, Dad could bring me back and he would be happy to get me started with the hobby.

To humour them, I agreed.

Non of these models were anything like the one I’d seen in the school. That was small, it was simple to fly, and just how hard could it have been to build?

They knew that I was far too young to accomplish the hobby, and would be for some years to come. I, on the other hand, with the impatience and overconfidence of youth, chose to ignore their wise counsel.

I merely let it lie, ’till closer to Christmas.

Then, I began asking again, dismissing all objections, until they had only the one left. They didn’t know where to get one from… But I did!

During my many visits to Lewiss’ store, in Manchester, I had learned the location of every item in the Toy Department, including the Model Counter. I even knew the make of the model aircraft sold there. ‘Frog’.

With nowhere left to go, my parents reluctantly agreed I could have one, for Christmas.

Christmas morning, next, I eagerly opened the box, to find, not a box of parts, as I’d expected, but several sheets of balsa wood, a folded sheet of tissue paper, some wire, elastic, plastic propeller, and a plan.

Not to be put off, I attempted to press the wooden parts from the sheets, as instructed, but to no avail. My clumsy young fingers soon had many of the fuselage formers ruined. I was totally dismayed. I did, however, have the sense to know when to give up, put everything back in the box and replace the lid, until I was older and would know how to repair the broken bits, I put the kit away, along with the red yacht, which I still didn’t know how to sail.

That kit never did get built, it had suffered too much damage. Others did, however, many years later. My enthusiasm wasn’t even dented.

By some strange providence, almost coincidentally a group of model aircraft enthusiasts began to meet on Sunday mornings, at Civic Centre fields. Barry and I had got into the habit of going there to fish for tiddlers, in one of the many ponds.

This one morning, however, all thoughts of fishing were forgotten when this group turned up with all these models. Gliders, free-flighters, control-liners, even some with rudimentary radio control.

I went most Sundays, after that. I sat and watched. I walked around. I got under peoples feet. I even came close to standing on the odd model. But most of all, I asked questions. Lots and lots of questions.

Soaking up the knowledge for the day when I would be able to try again, for myself.

**Chapter 34** On Screened Felony

Like most Summer Holidays, since Mam had gone back to work, I was sent to spend some time at Fallowfield.

As ever, most mornings began with a shopping expedition. This could simply be to the local shops, on The Lane, or further afield. I remember well, how one day in1957 my Nana walked me down Lloyd Street, all the way through the tenements of Moss Side, past the dreaded Dental Hospital and on to visit the Pauldens’ department store, at All Saints.

All Saints was then a bustling shopping area, complete with cinemas, cafes, etc. The biggest thing there though, was Pauldens’.

A huge department store, in the old style. From the food and cosmetic departments, on the ground floor, to the clothes and furniture, on the higher ones, you could buy just about anything there. Added to which, being outside the city centre, their overheads were lower and hence, so were their prices.

The adverts on the local busses proclaimed, ‘Why go to town? It’s worth a bus ride to Pauldens’. My grandmother liked to shop there.

This particular day, however, all *that* would come to an end. As we cleared the right hand bend, around the bulk of the Dental Hospital we could see that all was not well. Ahead of us, a rising plume of smoke filled the sky. There were signs of much activity around its source. We carried on.

When we arrived at Pauldens’, or as near as the Fire Brigade and Police would allow, it was clear that neither we, nor anyone else, would be shopping there, ever again.

Paulden’s, but for a few twisted girders, was completely gone. The Fire Brigade were completing their ‘damping down’.

“Come on lad.” Nana said. “We’ve no further business here today. No doubt we’ll be reading all about it in the Evening News.” Then, sighing and shaking her head, she led me on the start of the long walk back.

The company continued trading, after a fashion, in the TA drill hall opposite. We never went there. Many years later, Paulden’s re-opened, in the Rylands building, on Market Street in Manchester city centre.

Now, you *had* to go to town, to shop at Paulden’s. Though now it was just a *brand name*, which had been bought up by the Debenham group.

As soon as the store had re-established itself, the old familiar name was dropped and the signs were changed to Debenham’s

From the day of the fire onward, the furthest we would walk in that direction, would be the Trustee Savings Bank, on the corner of Claremont Road, opposite the Claremont, ABC cinema, where the Manchester City Supporters Club stood. Here the family would deposit its meagre savings.

These were collected in a Home Bank, in the shape of a small, hard backed book, which was taken to the branch for opening and depositing. It had a slot for coins, plus a small, round hole for inserting rolled up bank notes. The hole was rarely used.

Because of the way in which I was taught to save, plus the many visits to this friendly, neighbourhood bank, when I became an adult I too became a ‘member’ of the Trustee Savings Bank.

Until, that is, The Government, decided to sell the TSB, out from under the feet of its members and legal owners.

They had a unique definition of mutuality, which meant that all the money raised from the sale, went straight into the chancellor’s coffers, instead of to the members.

The current result of this action, is that the TSB too, now exists in name only. The bank has been swallowed whole by Lloyds. Eventually, when Lloyds decide that it is prudent to do so, the letters TSB will probably be quietly dropped from the bank’s name. Just the way Paulden’s was, by Debenham’s.

*Actually, that didn’t happen. Still part of Lloyd’s Group, the TSB was re-launched in 2015.*

By far the most common objective now, when walking in that direction, would be Parkside Stores. This was the nickname given to the CO-OP shops, next to the Parkside Hotel on Lloyd Street, close to Maine Road football ground. There was a grocery and a butchers shop.

One day, when we walked into the grocery shop, that too had changed out of all recognition.

Gone were the wooden fitments, with shelves and drawers. Gone was the low, intimate lighting. Gone, was that indefinable atmosphere, with its smells and sounds. But most shockingly of all, gone too was the counter, with its smiling, aproned assistants, which had cut the shop cleanly in two and clearly defined where the customer’s territory stopped, and the staff’s began. The Stores had *gone* ‘self service’.

Despite the fact that it was relatively small, all the elements of the modern ‘hypermarket’ were there right from the start. The wall to wall shelving, the gondolas, the veg. bins and the delicatessen.

The bright, fluorescent lights, the baskets, (though only the small, hand ones), and last but not least, the checkouts with their inevitable queues. It was a major cultural shock. The times they were a’changing, and I thought it was fabulous.

Nana, however, was very sad indeed.

However traumatic the arrival of the embryo supermarkets may have been, for the older generation, I realised the benefits immediately. With the removal of the barriers between me and the goods, I had become empowered.

I could see, I could touch, I could compare. The only thing I couldn’t do, in fact, was taste. That much was made very clear, right away!

Instead of everything being bought from a list, as before, now there was an unprecedented element of choice. A choice in which *I* now had a degree of control. Pester power had shifted into second gear.

One commodity which the family always kept in, at both addresses, was processed cheese. I liked it!

I liked it on sandwiches, on toast, and on its own during breaks at school. The type of processed cheese I liked best, came in small, individually wrapped portions. Shaped as small rectangles or triangles. Triangle cheese was my favourite.

And so it was with great delight, that during a visit to the new ‘self service’, I discovered that one particular make of ‘triangle cheese’, Dairylea, were having an interesting promotion.

Inside each flat, circular carton containing the triangles, was a 35mm. colour transparency. A mounted photographic slide, no less.

In some of the larger boxes there were two or more. Along with these slides were vouchers, and an order form. Again, more in the larger boxes.

According to the form, once you had collected sufficient vouchers, you could send them away and receive an *absolutely free (plus postage and packing)* working slide projector, with which to view your collection of slides. There was even a drawing of the projector. It looked great…… I wanted one!

I did a rough calculation, based upon the family’s cheese consumption, number of shopping trips, at both addresses, etc. and worked out, that even if I considerably increased my own personal consumption, it would be a very long time indeed, if ever, before I would have enough vouchers for a projector. I, therefore, hatched a totally illegal and thoroughly immoral plot.

I reasoned that, in all probability, most of the purchasers of Dairylea Cheese Spread, simply *liked* the cheese. Chances were, that most of the slides, along with their valuable vouchers, would go straight into the bin. So, I would relieve them of that chore. What I did was this.

During all subsequent visits to ‘The Stores,’ whilst *my adult* was otherwise occupied, I would scuttle around to the cheese shelf. Under the pretence of selection, I would, with deft sleight of hand, shuffle the slides and vouchers from several boxes, into one. I had to be careful over the number of slides though, or the lid would stand proud of the box and wobble, thus giving the game away.

I also had to be careful of the large convex mirrors, with which the staff kept a look-out for shoplifters.

By this means, in a relatively short period of time, I had enough vouchers to send away for a projector; and a collection of slides to show on it.

I bought a postal order for the p&p, filled in the form, popped them all in an envelope, posted it, and waited - and waited. I thought it would never come. Then just when I had about given up hope, it did.

To say that there was a slight discrepancy between the drawings of the slide projector shown in the advertising, and what actually turned up in the mail, must be the understatement of the millennium. No ‘Trades Descriptions Act’ then, remember!

Advertisers and promotions people could promise virtually anything they wanted, *and they did*, and get away with it. What should have been a kit to build a thoroughly professional looking slide projector, was in fact an envelope containing little more than a pack of brightly coloured, printed cardboard sheets. And two small, but remarkably good, glass lenses.

Once the initial disappointment had worn off, I got stuck in.

Following the instruction card, I first cut out all the parts. These, when folded, glued, and joined together, did, actually, begin to look a bit like the promotional pictures.

The lenses, when glued into two, telescoping, square cardboard tubes, produced a practical, focussing, condenser lens system. There was even an operating, cardboard, slide holder and changer. The only question left to answer, was, how would the illumination be provided? The answer to this proved to be, in a very dicey way indeed!

The lantern housing had turned out to be exactly the same shape and size as on a normal projector. The only difference was that, whereas the real ones were made out of metal, this one was simply cardboard. And it was intended that it should contain a naked, 100 watt, domestic light bulb.

I didn’t like it! But then again, neither did I see any alternative. I just trusted that the designers knew what they were doing, and carried on.

Without asking my parents permission, I cannibalised my bedside lamp for its lamp-holder, flex, switch and bulb. Then, in the disused front bedroom, with the curtains closed, I switched it on.

‘Bloody hell’! It worked! With a little work on the focus, there on the wall was a perfectly resolved and very big, colour picture. I was entranced. I felt the lantern housing to see how hot it was getting. Very, was the answer, but no sign of any singeing. I crossed my fingers and viewed all of my extensive collection of slides, several times over.

In a short time, I had shown all my friends my new toy. Barry Winn, in typical style, overreacted.

Within days he had converted his father’s garden shed into a mini-cinema. Complete with screen, ticket window, and even a battery illuminated ‘EXIT’ sign, with green cellophane over the front.

Crazy, but an awful lot of fun!

Thank you Dairylea!

**Chapter 35** Matriculation is a Pain in the Gut

Soon, I would be moving up into the Top Class.

At last, there would be no kids from a higher year, to boss me around.

This included the girl next door, Annette Shaw, who, in order to amuse her friends, was want to pick me up and swing me around by my feet. She took great delight in seeing just how close she could get my head to the playground without hitting it. Sometimes she got too damn close. Ouch!

Following my tenth birthday, September rolled around, and we were all back to school. I was to be in Mr. Willington’s class. He was a good teacher, the Deputy Head and a great bloke.

Affectionately, we all called him ‘Pop Willy’.

From now on lessons would take a definite shift in gear, in order to try and make sure we would pass the, dreaded, Scholarship, *(11-plus exam)* at the end of the year.

We’d done some preparation for this before, of course. The previous term had culminated with us sitting, what was referred to as, the Mock Scholarship. I’d enjoyed it, and thought I must have done pretty well. Now was the time to find out.

When the results were revealed, at the inevitable *post mortem*, it transpired that I hadn’t done as well as I’d thought. I was told that I would have to ‘pull my socks up’.

Not only was being in Mr. Willington’s class, good for me academically, but I was to meet two people here with whom I would become very close, for the rest of my school-days.

Robert Norton was a tall, gangly lad, who had been moved up from a different class to the one in which I had previously been. We quickly discovered several interests in common.

Cars, boats, aeroplanes, (both toys and full sized,) toy soldiers, and trains. His father, who was also very keen on models of all sorts, had made a large Hornby Dublo model railway, in one of their bedrooms.

We never tired of conversation, and built up large, competing collections of soldiers and Dinky Toys.

Jean Goodwin, was one of a pair of near identical twins, whose family had just moved into the neighbourhood. They had an elder sister, Wendy, who being a year older had had the sheer good fortune to be going straight into the inaugural year at our new secondary school. *Everyone* there would be new. She would slot right in.

Jean, and her sister Ann, however, were being wrenched from friends and familiar surroundings, and dropped into the top class at a strange, well established school. They would need help.

Pop Willy told the class as much. And asked everyone to do their best, to make the Goodwins feel welcome.

I took a shine to Jean immediately, and she to me. We were to be together, as sweethearts, boy/girlfriend, on again, and off again, for the rest of my schooldays. I was going to enjoy *this* school year, better than any other so far.

Under her influence I was to apply to join, the school choir, country dancing group, and percussion band.

Of the first, Miss Stevens tried to let me down gently, by telling me that I sang slightly ‘below the note’. She meant, of course, that I was ‘flat’, and so the choir was not for me.

Of the last, I was a reasonable success in the band. Bringing something special, I believed, to the realm of triangle playing.

In the dance group, however, Jean and I had a great time. All those jigs, reels and square-dances gave me licence to show off, and to get my hands on girls at the same time, and all with official approval.

Like I said, a very good year.

The Goodwins stood apart from all the other girls in school for another reason. Whereas the rest wore regulation navy blue, elasticated, flannel school knickers, theirs were bottle green.

Presumably this had been the uniform colour at their previous school and Mrs. Goodwin had decided to save the expense of replacing them, just for one year.

There was something about that bottle green!

During this year, in Mr. Willington’s class, several other things are also worth a mention.

I attained the much coveted position of running the school tuck shop.

Not nearly as grand as it sounds, The Shop, was in reality just two tables, pushed together, in the school entrance hall.

Each morning break, me and Glenys Charlton would load these tables with an assortment of pre-packed biscuits, (Cadbury’s Snacks, Yo-Yos, Blue Ribands, etc), plus potato crisps and other light comestibles.

We had to organise and run it just like a proper shop though, keeping tabs on the float and the stock levels, working out the profits and generally keeping the books straight. There was a bunce, of course, there had to be. We got all *our* stuff at cost.

The classroom had a small library, with books of a higher intellectual level than the lower classes. Many of these books were of a technical nature, and I soaked up their contents like a sponge.

One such book dealt with the future of architecture and design, focussing upon the Manchester area.

I was familiar with some of the futuristic aspects of American design, as seen in the movies. The concrete and glass buildings and the urban freeways, with their flyovers and underpasses. We had nothing like them.

In this book, however, were architects drawings and photographs of models, two of which especially attracted my attention.

One set was for an American style, Highway in the Sky. An elevated roadway which, the caption said, would one day pass through, or rather over, the centre of Manchester. Linking the suburbs of the north and south, without vehicles having to negotiate the tangle of typical city centre streets.

A second set, depicted a model of a large concrete structure, similar to a military aircraft hanger. The ends were totally glassed in and the big entrance doors had a curved canopy, over them, which appeared far too large for its slim, tubular legs to support.

This, declared the legend, was a design for a futuristic, Olympic sized, swimming pool, to be built, not just in Manchester but actually in Wythenshawe.

Close then, not only to where I lived but to where I then sat, looking at that picture of the model.

I was, at the same time, both excited and nonplussed. The thought of the possibility of these advanced structures, so close to home, was electrifying.

I was, however, convinced that the conservatism, which I observed to be rife in this country, would never allow them to be built. For one so young, to harbour such scepticism! In time this scepticism was to prove unfounded.

Only four years were to pass, before the opening of Wythenshawe Swimming Pool.

The secondary school, which I would be, by then, attending, would switch its lessons and hold its galas there. I would also use it privately, in the company of my friends, Jean included.

Years later, my brother Paul and I would rent the entire building, several times, to hold indoor model boat regattas. Then, scant years after that, I would see the building marooned by motorways, fall into disuse, and be demolished.

I was amazed and sad to see it be allowed to deteriorate so, and be knocked down so soon. It was a wonderful concept, with its café, spectator seating, wide span roof, and high diving boards.

The new Millennium Pool, which was opened to serve Manchester when it played host to the last Commonwealth Games, is smaller and not a patch on it. I’m not just sad, I’m annoyed and amazed at the foolishness.

It was to be a full, ten years, though, until the Mancunian Way would be opened to traffic. The Highway in the Sky, was not only built, it has been regularly modified and extended since, to cope with changing demands.

The day before it opened to traffic, it was thrown open for the public to walk along. I went along with my, then, fiancé, Pam., and marvelled at the construction.

We went along the full length, twice. Just one thing puzzled me, though. There was a short stub of roadway branching off and pointing towards the city. It went nowhere, and the end was railed off. I still wonder about that branch today, as I regularly use the Mancunian Way. It’s still there, still going nowhere, only now there are grass and trees growing out of it and a hoarding covering the end. Why?

At the junior school, swimming lessons went on in Pop Willy’s class, just as they had in Mr. Allsop’s. During the previous year, following some of the lessons, I had experienced discomfort and pain, in my solar plexus. Often these would be short lived. Sometimes my mother would be sent for to take me home. This situation gradually got worse.

Mam had already taken me to see our GP, Dr. Fowler. He had found nothing. Now Dr. Fowler sent me to the hospital, for tests. They found nothing either. The pains, however, continued to get worse.

About an hour after returning from a swimming lesson, in early November, the pains began. As usual they increased in intensity, to the point where I asked to be excused from the class.

As they continued to get worse, I sat in Miss Stevens’ comfy chair, in the Head Mistress’ office, waiting for my Mam to arrive. I’d been here before. This time, however, would be different. I would not be back in class the following day.

Mam put me to bed, with a hot water bottle on my abdomen, as usual. The pains improved, under the effects of the warmth. Later in the day, though, I found that I had to refuse my tea. I couldn’t face food, only drinks. Later, this was to prove very fortunate.

Then, well past dark, the pain really started with a vengeance, and it was moving. From dead centre, across to my right hand side. Dr. Fowler was sent for!

Following a short examination, involving an internal, Dr. Fowler sent for an ambulance. My one year, grumbling appendix, had turned into peritonitis, and was in danger of bursting.

I had no idea what this meant, apart from the fact that I was now ‘an emergency’, lying in the back of an ambulance with its blue lights and bell, going like the clappers towards Wythenshawe Hospital.

From reaching ‘Casualty’ (A&E), things moved so fast that most of them are a blur. The one item that definitely isn’t, though, is the well imprinted memory of being ‘shaved’, by a large nurse wielding a shaving brush and safety razor. I didn’t know I could hold my breath for so long!

It was 11pm, by the time I’d been pre-medded and was having a chat with an anaesthetist.

Lying on a trolley and dressed in an elasticated cap and long white gown, over full length, white, woollen stockings, I was told to count up, slowly, to ten.

I think I made it to four before the nightmares started. I’ve always had bad dreams under general anaesthetic, and this time was no exception. Then, all of a sudden, I was being rudely woken up.

It was some unearthly time of the morning. About 6.30am I think. I was in the Children’s Ward, and it was still dark outside the windows. I was totally disoriented and a little frightened.

This soon vanished, however, as the previous evenings memories returned, and I realised that I was surrounded by other children, who were also being, just as rudely, woken up.

I was in a bed near the door and nurses station, with a bunch of other new arrivals. Some of them too, had had operations the previous day.

It was a mixed sex ward, and in the next bed was a girl, of similar age to myself. She too had suffered an appendectomy, just a few hours earlier than mine. It was with some surprise then, when later that morning a lady physiotherapist arrived and told all us, new lot, that we would have to do some exercises.

Now I’d already been told not to exert myself, and risk bursting my stitches. Not that I needed any telling, you understand. Every time I moved at all, it hurt like hell. So, the chances of my submitting to some loony, who wanted me to do physical jerks, lying on top of my quilt, were slim indeed. I told her as much!

She was indignant at my intervention in her routine. She kept going on, as to how she knew what she was doing and ‘orders were orders.’ I called a nurse. Then, the fur began to fly.

It turned out, that the Physio. had chosen the wrong bunch of kids. We, as I had surmised, were to take it very easy, for at least three days. I suspected that she didn’t like me. My bedfellows, on the other hand, did.

We all got on great after that. There’s nothing like a bit of adversity, to pull a team together, is there?

Whilst in hospital, it was November 5th, Bonfire Night. Some of the visiting parents, mine included, had brought presents of fireworks on the previous nights. These were added to by the staff who, in the evening, pushed all the non walking wounded outside.

Some, like me, sat on chairs. Others were in wheel-chairs, and some, even in their beds. There, outside the end doors to the ward, we were treated to a huge bonfire, with fireworks and all the trimmings.

The Doctors and Nurses ran around like a lot of big kids. I enjoyed seeing *them* enjoying themselves as much as I enjoyed it myself. For just that one magic evening, the barriers were down. We were all just one big bunch of happy children, having a good time.

I was to be there a fortnight, with another two weeks convalescence to follow. I felt that this was a long time to be away from school, during term time. So I wrote the class a letter, telling them all about my experience. This resulted in their being given an unexpected English lesson. They each had to write back to me, in reply.

I was sent to my Nana’s for the two weeks convalescence, and it was here that I was brought the letters from my classmates. I enjoyed reading them all, but why did they all seem to have a fixation about my appendix scar? Apart from that, it was back to the old routine.

‘Housewives Choice’, every morning. Trip to the shops. Cooking, washing, ‘Mrs. Dales Diary’ and ‘Woman’s Hour’. Oh! And ‘The Archers’ too. Mustn’t forget ‘The Archers’. The UK’s longest running soap opera was begun during WWII, by the Ministry of Agriculture, and is still going strong to this day. I still, sometimes, listen in.

To occupy my spare time, over these two weeks, I asked to be bought a book, from Byng’s toy shop.

This book, was of the cut out and build kind. On each page, were elaborately detailed parts for a steam railway locomotive, complete with tender. The Flying Scotsman.

When these were cut out, shaped and glued together, the result was a bright green engine, almost three feet long.

The loco. had a fully detailed cab, and the wheels and valve gear turned. Along with its similarly detailed tender, the whole thing sat on a section of cardboard track, complete with sleepers and raised rails.

It sat for quite a long time on the sideboard at Marbury Avenue. I often wonder whatever happened to it.

**Chapter 36** Training, Gaining and Losing an Uncle

Christmas was upon us, once again. I had asked for a ‘two wheeler, bike’, but was once more told that I would have to wait. Having seen Robert Norton’s dad’s Hornby layout, I chose, instead, a Tri-ang electric train set.

This was ordered from Mam’s, Kays mail order catalogue, and consisted of an oval of track, two ‘blood and custard’ coaches, and scale model of a black, Stannier Princess Class, Pacific tender locomotive. ‘Princess Elizabeth’.

I’d had a train set once before. Back at Lloyd Street, I had been given a clockwork, printed tinplate version of the Coronation Scot. An early Hornby.

This consisted of a foreshortened, four wheeled, streamlined locomotive, with matching tender and two small coaches. Together they orbited a very small circle of pressed tin track.

I wish I still had it today. In mint condition, with its box, as my toys mostly were, it would now be worth serious money. I have no idea what happened to that, either.

When delivered, the Tri-ang train set was hidden, as my presents always were, on top of Dad’s tall wardrobe. I had become a ‘past master’ at finding things that I wasn’t supposed to, opening them very carefully, and putting them back, looking as if they had never moved. By these means, I played with the new train set for a full month before Christmas.

Every afternoon, on returning from school, I would run upstairs, stand on the bed, remove the red and yellow box and take it downstairs. Here, I would carefully assemble the track, on the living room carpet, connect the battery box, and place the train on the rails.

I allowed myself half an hour’s play, before packing it all away again. This usually gave me plenty of leeway, before Mam arrived home, with Brother Paul in tow. Though there *were* a few close calls.

It was not surprising, then, that Christmas morning was something of an anti-climax. I was much more interested in all the other packages, whose contents *were* a mystery to me, than in that familiarly shaped red and yellow one.

I did go on, over later months, to add many accessories to the train set. The best of these being the ‘Operating Night Mailcoach Set’.

I made a start on a layout, too, but this never progressed beyond the building of the baseboard.

Many years later, when I revived my interest in model railways, I went looking for my original set. It was nowhere to be found. Eventually, brother Paul admitted to having sold the lot, one day when he was in need of some cash. He got very little for it.

That black, first, edition, Princess Elizabeth, is now a most sought after collectable model, 00 gauge, locomotive. Like the tinplate Coronation Scot, it too would, today, be worth a lot of money.

This particular Christmas *would* be special, though, for a very different reason.

The last Christmas, but one, had included the first, and only, Boxing Day family reunion, from which my Auntie Clarice had been absent.

Quite unbeknown to me, early the year before, she had become attached to a man whose family lived close by, in an exactly similar house, on an exactly similar avenue.

A cabinet maker by trade, George Truswell had been on home leave, from a lucrative contract in Gibraltar.

Before his leave was over, they had become engaged and Clarice went back to Gibraltar with him. Marriage and pregnancy, quickly followed. Nana received copies of the wedding photos, but she suffered greatly from mixed emotions.

Happy for her daughter, of course, but at the same time sad for herself and the rest of the family, who had been excluded from the celebrations.

The baby was due to be born early in 1956, and so the Truswells came home for Christmas.

I didn’t take to my Uncle George, and I think that it was mutual. It wasn’t that I actively disliked him, you understand, I just sensed that he was a bit ‘flash’, and looked down, somewhat, upon the Peggs and Yearsleys. No one else seemed to think so, though, and it may just have been *his* reaction to *my* interest in his ‘stuff’, which put me off. Interestingly, years later, when actor George Cole portrayed his Arthur Daley character, there was a remarkable resemblance.

He wore expensive looking, well cut, clothes, had a, then expensive, portable radio, a self winding wrist watch, and a 35mm camera.

Everyone else I knew used ‘Kodak’ type roll-film cameras, with fixed focus lenses. Microfilm was for professionals only!

George’s camera was fully adjustable for focus, aperture and speed, had lever-wind, tripod mount, cable shutter release, *and* it had the first flash-gun I’d ever seen which didn’t need a fresh bulb after every shot. It was one of the very earliest electronic flashes, and *they* were expensive.

Mounted on a bracket clamped to the bottom of the camera, the seven inch diameter reflector had a convex plastic, frosted cover. The power to charge it up came from a rechargeable, bakelite, battery pack, the size and shape of a ladies evening bag. This was heavy, and had to be carried around on a shoulder strap, connected to the camera by a curly lead…..

I wanted to get my hands on that camera.

Understandably, with hindsight and the wisdom of age, George was unhappy about my proximity to his camera. Being an uncle plainly didn’t come easy to him, though he did try, to a degree.

He finally tried to act uncley towards me, and demonstrated the features of the camera at close quarters, as long as I kept my hands down by my sides. Strangely, that camera eventually came into my possession.

Shortly after the birth of the baby, my cousin Nigel, George returned to Gibraltar, to continue with his job. Clarice, with the new baby, stayed in England. I was not privy to any of the arrangements, of course. Why would I have been?

It soon became clear, though, that George was going to provide for his family via the facility of postal orders. These came, regular as clockwork, every Thursday morning.

Clarice would then push Nigel, in his expensive, anti-tilt pram, to the local Post Office, cash the orders and spend the money in the Platt Lane shops.

The money came and was immediately spent on necessities. That’s how vital it was. If I was staying at Marbury Avenue, I would pick up the blue airmail envelope from behind the door, and claim the stamp. Then I would accompany Aunty Clarice, ‘down to The Lane’. Part of the way, down the back streets, actually being allowed to push the pram.

It was by some strange coincidence, therefore, that on the Thursday, of the first week of my, post-appendectomy convalescence, the usual envelope failed to hit the doormat. I reported this fact to my Aunt. What happened then, came as a complete shock.

A look of total panic spread across Clarice’s face. She asked if I was sure. After I confirmed this, she shot through the door and ran down the street, in pursuit of the post-man. Halfway down the opposite side of the avenue, she caught up with him and insisted he completely empty his satchel. Seeing the look in her eyes, he complied.

The search proved fruitless, only white and brown envelopes were in evidence. Not a single blue one with red flashes around the edge. To break the tension, the postie. suggested that there might have been a delay in the mail. “It’ll probably turn up tomorrow.” He said.

I saw my Aunt relax, visibly. Though the postal order had always been punctual so far, that needn’t mean that it always would be, did it? Thanking the postman, we walked back to the house.

Friday morning was almost a re-run of Thursday. Still no show on the airmail front. It would almost certainly arrive Saturday, or at the latest Monday, suggested the postman, clearly wishing that he were somewhere else.

When *these* days too, came and went, Clarice managed to convince herself, that come the following Thursday, a double payment would arrive, and everything would then be back on track. That hope was holding her up.

When the second Thursday came up empty, too, she broke down. Nana poured comforting words and hugs, upon her youngest daughter, but to no avail. She just sobbed and sobbed, repeating over and over, “What am I going to do? What am I going to do?” There was no real reply.

Nana just kept on saying, “We’ll manage, luv, we’ll manage.” I felt completely helpless.

My Aunty Clarice was never to see nor hear from her husband, George, ever again, nor cousin Nigel, his father.

And so it was, with typical childish selfishness, that I looked forward to the Boxing Day celebrations of 1956. The Family would be back as normal. Complete with my Auntie Clarice, but without the addition of any *strangers.* Except for one very small one, of course, who would soon be one year old.

In this game of consequences which we call life, however, every action has an infinite number of possible reactions. That brief arrival of George Truswell in our midst, *had* caused several permanent changes at number seven.

Previously, Nana had, as at Lloyd Street, occupied the master bedroom. Installed in it was her double bed, and all her other personal valuables. With the introduction of, not just, a married couple to the premises, but also a baby’s cot, she and her daughter traded rooms.

For my Grandmother this was a very emotional experience; surrender, almost. An admission that she was getting old and must move aside to make way for the younger generation. With all her things shoehorned into the second bedroom, it was very crowded indeed.

Up to that point, when I had stayed there, I had shared that big double bed, with my Grandmother. Now I would be sharing it with my Aunt.

When, in the fullness of time, my Uncle Vic. left home too and got married, his small box-room became entirely mine. Until, that is, when he outgrew his cot and this would pass to Cousin Nigel. All that, however, was then a long way off.

The second consequence of that Christmas, caused even more of an upheaval.

At the Boxing Day family reunion, there hadn’t been room to swing a cat. There *had* been additional children, year on year, but this time, with George leaping around with that camera, the lack of space had reached a hiatus.

Corporation house designers had always been very big on built in furniture. It was socially responsible. It made the best use of the available space, especially awkward corners, and the tenants needed to buy less furniture of their own.

The houses in and around Marbury Avenue, had lots of built in furniture. The biggest and best of these, was a large wall unit in the living room. Known to everyone in the family, as ‘The Fitment’, my Nana hated it!

The fitment was, quite simply, a big, built in dresser. Filling a large alcove, between the doors to the front hallway, and the kitchen, it reached from floor level, where it was fronted by skirting board, to door height, where it was fronted with a moulding which continued the line of the picture rail. The top of the unit, formed a broad, flat shelf.

From beneath this, to the floor, ran two vertical supports, which divided the space below into three. A narrow division at either end, with a wide one in the centre. These, each had a cavernous shelf at their upper ends, below which, were twin cupboards with a chest of drawers in between.

It worked well, but Nana had moved in, complete with her big, black, mirror backed sideboard. No way was she getting rid of that! The room, then, effectively had two big dressers. They sat on opposite walls, totally dominating the room. Up until now, this situation had been tolerated, but no longer.

Uncle Vic. was ordered, by his mother, to “Get rid of that ruddy thing.” When he explained that the consequence would be a wide gap, in both the skirting and the picture rail, he was told that he could, “fix the skirting board, but get rid of the ruddy picture rail, at the same time.”

Nana, uncharacteristically impractical for once, had given not a single thought, to the voluminous contents of ‘the fitment’.

This lot, including the contents of the bottom drawer, which were *my* toys and books, were evicted and stacked variously about the house. Vic. then proceeded to reduce the big unit to fire-wood, which was bundled, tied, and stacked in the coal-place, under the stairs.

He had though, first removed and saved the piece of skirting board from the front of the unit. He surmised, correctly, that this would fit perfectly into the back of the alcove, leaving him to find just two small pieces, from somewhere, for the ends.

With the ‘built in fitment’ removed, it exposed an area of pristine, virgin floor-boards. These had last seen the light of day, immediately prior to the unit being fitted.

Vic. was standing on these, skirting in hand, preparing to offer it up to the wall, when catastrophe struck. The boards may have been pristine, the joists, holding them up, were not. They were rotten, through lack of ventilation.

With a resounding crack, uncle Vic. fell through, up past his knees. The rotted joists had snapped off at each end, where they went into the walls. The job was abandoned, and the council joiners sent for.

The joiners, not only, replaced the section of ruined floor, they also did the skirting board work too, saving Vic. a job. He did, however, have to rip out all the picture rail, as bidden, and Pollyfilla the gap. This left a horrendous scar right around the wallpaper, which was to remain for a long, long time, until the room was re-decorated.

Nana’s big, black, mirror backed sideboard, was then moved into the alcove vacated by ‘the fitment’.

She wasn’t finished yet, though.

The mirror back, was topped with a small *roof,* held up by two ‘candy twist’ spindles, resting on small shelves containing little drawers. This *roof* was bordered by an impressive, mitred, deep moulded cornice. The one person who wasn’t impressed by this, was Nana.

She had long regarded that cornice, as nothing more than a giant dust trap, which was too high for her to clean inside of.

Vic. was ordered to “Get rid of that ruddy thing, an’ all.” While he was about it. He tried to explain, that this would ruin, both the appearance and value of the sideboard, at a single stroke. But she was having non of it. That cornice had to go. So, sadly, my Uncle Vic. committed the ordered vandalism, and broke it up. It looked terrible.

Nana, then produced a feather duster, and ran this over, what was now, just an insignificant, and distinctly odd looking, thin, flat shelf. “Lovely,” she said, as clouds of thick dust cascaded down, “I’ve been wanting to do that for years”.

Much, of what *had* been the contents of ‘the fitment’, was then stacked around and under the dresser. And there it stayed.

Happy New Year, 1957!

# **Chapter 38** Testing Times

Back at school and, for my class, it was full steam ahead towards *that* Scholarship exam. And so, there were tests every day, in one or more subjects.

The non academic lessons still went on, but there was no mistaking where the focus now lay.

Behind our desks.

A feature of the 11 plus syllabus were MENSA style IQ tests, referred to as ‘Comprehension Tests’. I had always found these a fun game and so did, not surprisingly, well at them.

Composition, (essays) had always proven easy too.

I was never short of ideas to write about, and found that filling page after page of foolscap paper just, kind of, happened, without my really having to try very hard. The only problem was bringing my tales to an end. Perhaps by now, dear reader, you may have worked this out for yourself.

Things were not all rosy, however. I had never been any great shakes at the core academic subjects.

I learned my Times Tables by rote, so that was a help, but I will always struggle with all but the most basic, Arithmetic. Similarly with English.

Though I have been blessed with a good natural ability, in its use, I have never been able to grasp the more complex mechanics of language. Spelling, especially, has always been something of a bugbear. That this tome is in any way intelligible, is largely due to the exigencies of the Spell-checker.

So it was not, in any way, a foregone conclusion, that I would pass *‘The Scholarship’*. The direction of my future academic life was, well and truly, hanging in the balance. It seemed that I was not alone.

Many of my friend’s parents were determined, that *their* offspring *would* get to Grammar School. So, in order to load the dice in that direction, even the pillars of the community were not above a little bribery.

Alan Ashburner said to me, whilst playing in the street one day, “If I pass my scholarship, my Mam and Dad have said I can have a new, two wheeler bike.”

“So have mine.” chorused a couple of others. On further questioning, it transpired that a goodly number of my peers would fetch up considerably richer, in various ways, should they do well in the exams. In hopes, I conveyed this news to my own parents.

I received in return, not a suggestion towards parity, but a lecture on the merits of buckling down and trying to do well, for its own sake and not in pursuit of gain.

Somewhat chastened, I had no choice but to agree. So how come I felt like I’d been done up like a kipper?

The spectrum of abilities, in Mr. Willington’s class, ranged from the school swat, Derek Watkins, for whom the result was a forgone conclusion, to the ‘no hopers’. These last would, without any doubt, be heading for the local Secondary Modern school.

Whilst the staff tried not to de-motivate them from working towards the exam, they also, were very careful in not encouraging over expectation. It was a difficult job. I fell smack in the middle, and was hence, a problem.

Unlike everyone else in the class, I would actually be sitting the 11 plus exam at the age of ten. There would be another month or so until my eleventh birthday.

Officially, this situation was not catered for. It was, it seemed, technically illegal. If I were to fail ‘The Scholarship’, no-one was actually sure, precisely what the position would be. Would it be fair to send me to the Secondary Modern, effectively a year too soon? If not, would it be possible to hold me back, a year, for a second crack at it? I reckon everyone just crossed their fingers, and hoped for the best.

The school hall was set out for the examination.

This was the second time I’d seen it like this, with its rows of individual desks, and the adjudicator’s table on the stage. The previous year, following the last ‘top class’ taking *their* scholarship exam, we had used the same setup to do our practice (mock) exam. This time it was us who were doing it for real.

I thought I’d done OK. Some stuff had been easy, some hard; pretty much as I’d expected. I was aware that many of the ‘forgone conclusions’ had finished early, handed in their papers and left, but not all! Some of them slogged it out to the bitter end along with the rest of us.

The bigger surprise, was that some of the ‘no hopers’ also finished early and left. Was this because they had found the paper easier than expected?

Maybe, but I suspected some might just have been overwhelmed, and given up. I hoped, for their sakes, that I was wrong. Time alone would tell.

Following the exam, came a period of complete relaxation. The calm *after* the storm.

The term was brought to a close in lighter vein, with the class plays, a bring-and-buy sale, and a very special end of year party.

We all knew that, for many, this would be the end of close personal friendships, forged over several years. Since first entering this strange world, of school.

I knew, that if, by some miracle, I had passed the selection exam, I would be going to our sister Grammar School, also called Poundswick.

I was fully confident that Jean, and her twin sister Anne, would pass, and knew that as their older sister Wendy, already went there, then so too would they. I hoped we wouldn’t be split up. Ditto, with Robert Norton. I was sure he would pass too.

There was no way to know the results in advance of course, until our parents received them, sometime during the Summer holidays.

Normally, following the winding up of the school year, we would all part excitedly. Looking forward to the seemingly endless mid-year break, with cries of, ‘See you after the holidays’. But not this year!

Some of our number, we already knew, had been earmarked for higher things. If successful, and they surely would be, they were destined to go to Manchester Grammar, William Hulme High, and other similarly lofty establishments.

Kids who had learned hard, played hard, and yes, sometimes fought hard, shoulder to shoulder, for so long, were getting their first taste of the class divisions, which dominate British society. It wouldn’t be their last!

We collected all our belongings. Kit, clothes, books, and things we had made, written, drawn and painted. We said our goodbyes, especially to ‘Pop Willy’, and finally went our separate ways; to wait.

For what? We did not know.

It was the strangest of strange times, with the most mixed of mixed emotions. A unique experience, not to be repeated for another five years when, unbeknown to any of us back then, we would have to go through it all over again, but in a much bigger way.

We’d been told to put it all behind us, and enjoy the Summer Holidays. And not to worry, until we had our results.

Easier said than done. But I, for one, was going to give it a try.

**Chapter 39** The Jury’s In and I’m on the Fence

From that point on, throughout the holidays, my friends began to receive their results. I waited...

‘This damn surname’, I thought, and fully prepared myself to be last as usual. Meanwhile, an awful lot of new bikes were appearing on the street. I was jealous, but gritted my teeth and said nothing.

The results list was published in the Manchester Evening News. Jean Goodwin’s name was there, as too was Robert Norton’s. I scanned quickly to the end of the list. My name was not. So, I’ve failed, I thought, half sad but half, surprisingly, relieved.

One morning, a week or two later, I had got up early. Dad had gone off to work, but Mam and Paul were still in bed. I was waiting for the paper boy to deliver my Eagle comic. He didn’t beat the postman to the letterbox by many minutes, and I’d hardly begun reading, when there was a dull ‘thud’ on the mat.

The source of the thud was a well stuffed, giant manilla envelope, bearing the postal frank of the Manchester Education Committee. I knew immediately what it must be. Comic still in hand, I carried the envelope up the stairs and woke my Mother.

I stood next to the bed reading, whilst she emptied the contents onto the coverlet, and examined them.

The Eagle was a very famous boy’s comic. It not only included such notable characters as Dan Dare and Harris Tweed, but it catered for a budding interest in things technical too. Each broadsheet edition had, on its centrefold spread, a cutaway, technical drawing of a piece of machinery or vehicle.

It might be a railway locomotive, a combined harvester, or a hydro-electric generator. This particular morning, it was the ‘Leyland Atlantean Bus’. A design study of a proposed revolution in public transport. I was engrossed, gazing at this 77 seat monster, when my Mother spoke. “They say that you’re a Borderline Case.

“What’s that?” I replied.

She repeated herself, then went on to explain, that my marks were so close to the pass/fail point, that the feared quandary *had* ensued. The education authority had, after some deliberation, finally decided to take the gamble and send me to the Grammar School.

“Does that mean I’ve passed?” I queried. “Well yes, I suppose it does” said Mam, shaking her head.

She knew that, what meant increased opportunity for me, would just as surely mean increased expense for her. The already stretched family budget, was about to be tensioned like a banjo string.

The envelope also contained details of the way things were run at Poundswick Grammar School.

Firstly, the uniform requirements.

The Junior School also had a full uniform, in royal blue and gold, but virtually no-one wore more than the tie or pullover. At the Grammar School the provision of the full, maroon and grey, uniform was mandatory. Full descriptions and price lists, from the two authorised suppliers, were included.

I would need: Blazer, cap, grey flannel shorts, shirts (grey for winter, white for summer), tie, gym kit, games kit, overalls and workshop apron.

Plus, a new satchel, gym shoes and football boots. A prodigious list, at a prodigious price. I could well understand the look on my mother’s face.

There was, however, a noticeable difference in the prices of the two suppliers. The uniform from the Henry Barrie’s store, in central Manchester, was considerably more expensive than that available from Chatterton’s, in the nearby town of Gatley. No prizes then, for guessing that, not long afterwards, Mam and I, with Paul in tow, found ourselves on the bus to Gatley.

The uniform was very smart, apart, that is, from the fact that Mam expected me to make it last. She bought everything a size too big, to allow me room to grow. It felt like the uniform was wearing me, instead of the other way round. In the event, I needn’t have worried. *My* Mother wasn’t the only one with this thrifty idea.

On the opposite side of the road, to Chatterton’s Outfitters, I spotted a large, double fronted, model shop. Lee’s.

I had no idea that such specialised outlets existed. The windows were filled with large model aircraft and boats on display. I wanted to go across and look, but Mam, carrying several large carrier bags, said that there just wasn’t the time. So I contented myself with filing away the knowledge, for future use.

The one downside, to having the choice of two suppliers, was that it would, unwittingly, endow upon this new school, a ready made class system. Precisely the very thing, which uniforms are supposed to eradicate.

The Barrie’s blazers had a slightly smaller, neater badge embroidered on the breast pocket, than did those from Chatterton’s.

Apart from this they looked virtually identical, but it was enough to identify those with the more expensive clothing. There was no doubt, whatsoever, that the sixty percent of pupils with the lower cost uniforms would be looked down upon, with some disdain, by the minority who’s parents had lavished more cash upon their offspring. All this would become clear, in just a couple of weeks time.

Much of, what was left of, the summer holidays was spent in the company of Barry Winn. Shortly, we would be ensconced in separate school buildings, miles apart, if only for just the one year.

Most Saturday mornings saw us taking a bus ride to our second closest town, Northenden. Here there was a proper shopping centre, which even had a record store and a Woolworths. Also, it had our closest real cinema.

In common with many, of its time, the Forum had been built as a magnificent, fully equipped, art deco theatre. Complete with proscenium, dress circle and fly tower, I never knew it to be used for anything other than showing films though. What a waste!

Here we would queue, along with hundreds of others, clasping our pocket money and wearing our red white and blue button badges. These bore the proud logo of the Associated British Cinema chain, and we, as a group, were the ‘ABC Minors’.

Before the performance we would all join in with our anthem, ‘We are the Kids of the ABC’, The ABC Minors are we..Accompanied by the cinema organ, the console of which, rose up out of the floor of the orchestra pit.

Then we were treated to a superbly varied programme, of cartoons, westerns, science fiction and suspense films. All for a very few pence.

It filled the cinemas. It kept the kids off the street and out from under their parents feet. Plus, it gave the likes of Barry and myself a sense of identity, of belonging to a special group. Naff as it may seem, we wore our badges with pride.



I suppose the operators made quite a profit, really, from the sale of drinks, ice-cream and sweets. But I don’t care. It would have been cheap at several times the price, for the memories of being an ABC Minor.

In my heart, I still am one, whenever I pass that Pleasure-drome today. Even if nowadays, it’s a church. The Wythenshawe Kingdom Hall, of the Jehova’s Witnesses.

Weekdays, we mostly just wandered about the public footpaths with which the farmland, between Woodhouse Park and the airport, was criss crossed. We never had any money to spend, but *this* was not only fun, it was free.

One day, though, we did have a little money, or as good as. If we found any empty pop or beer bottles, during our meanderings, we took them home and hid them. The returned deposits on these, plus those from our own households, kept us in sweets at the local off-licence, known to everyone as ‘the outdoor’.

Today, we decided to be a little more adventurous.

In the shop, we enquired as to the price of a large bottle of Bulmer’s Woodpecker Cider. It transpired that, for the number of empty bottles, which we had accumulated, we could afford to buy two; always providing, of course, that the man behind the counter would let us have them.

No problem!

The Licensee obviously had no intention of letting a little matter of our being way under-age get in the way of profit. “These *are* for your parents, aren’t they?” he asked, with a wry smile. We crossed our fingers and concurred. He handed them over.

Once safely off the tarmac and into the fields, we stopped and took a pull from our bottles. We’d been allowed sips of cider before, and knew it to be just like strong apple juice. We liked it and saw no problem with our drinking it. We did, however, know full well that we were not supposed to, for some reason. This just added an illicit dimension to the game.

So, we walked, talked and sipped, walked, talked and sipped, eventually ending up on Ringway Road, at the point where the main runway crossed the carriageway. Yes, you read that correctly, the main runway, at Ringway Airport actually did cross the road.

Following two major extensions, the point where we then were, is now buried under concrete, about half a mile from the current runway’s end. Back then, the undershoot / overshoot area was on one side of the public road, the runway proper began immediately on the other side of the opposite fence.

Between the two, the gaps in the roadside fences were filled with loose, lightweight hurdle panels. These would collapse easily, if an aircraft wheel should as much as tap one.

During landings and take-offs, the traffic was brought to a short halt by traffic lights. These were backed up by signs warning, ‘Beware, Low Flying Aircraft’, and that was it. No one saw any real danger.

We had consumed about half our cider, a pint each, by the time we reached the runway. We were getting very silly. Over the hurdle fence, we found that we could clearly read the runway identification markings, painted on the concrete. We decided to lie down, on our backs, dead centre, heads against the fence, in the long grass at the side of the road, and have another drink, or two.

We lay there for quite some considerable time, gazing up at the sunny, lightly clouded sky. Conversation came around to, “What are you going to do, when you grow up.” I was quite clear. I was going to *become* Peter Green. *(My imaginary friend, of years earlier)*

I didn’t tell Barry about Peter Green, of course, that would only have reduced him to hysterics. I just said that I was going to, have a good job, be married, own my own house, have a car; that sort of thing.

I had a clear, if fanciful, vision, which at that time seemed totally impossible but turned out to be fairly accurate.

Barry, in contrast, had no such vision. He had no interest in material things, and could see only a short way ahead, with no clear idea of what, if anything, the future might hold. Sadly, this too turned out to be completely accurate.

I sensed he was not entirely comfortable, with this conversation, and changed the subject.

Up ahead of us, a B.E.A. Dakota was approaching, on finals, down the glide slope. Headlights full on in the wings, shining directly into our eyes. It got bigger, and bigger, and bigger, until, as it passed very closely overhead, we couldn’t just see the treads on the tyres but the manufacturer’s name on their sides, too.

They had seemed close enough to touch. Too bloody close! Great! We had another drink, or three.

We eventually tired of lying doggo in the long grass, whilst the bellies of aircraft, of all sizes, passed closely above our recumbent bodies. We decided to wave at the pilots.

In retrospect, I feel that this may have been a mistake!

Shortly afterwards, a dark blue Landrover, with white roof and blue flashing light, showed up. We knew who *they* were and quickly hid what remained of the hooch, in the long grass.

The Airport Policemen gave us a shouted lecture on the dangers of ‘trespassing on the flight-path’. We didn’t think we had been trespassing. It *was* a public road, after all. We didn’t say so, though. We kept our mouths tight shut, and just stood stock-still, simply nodding our heads. Any attempts at speech, on our part, would have been a dead give-away.

Then, unlike today, when I imagine a great hoo-har would result, many forms need filling in and parents notifying. We were just made to stand there and take it, then told to ‘bugger off and don’t come back.’ We did precisely that! For then, at least.

Eventually the fateful day arrived. The last day of the summer holidays prior to my starting at the Grammar School. This was much, much worse than the day before starting infant’s school or junior school. There was far more gravity to this situation. Where had those six weeks gone?

My parents tried to console me, by telling me:

That it was just the same school, really, just extended onto another site. Also, that I would still have most of my old chums around me, and be doing the same kind of things.

And, I would soon settle in and wonder what I was ever worried about.

All of the above turned out to be pretty much true in the event. But that night, with my pencil box and dinner money buckled into my new satchel. My new uniform shirt and shorts laid out for me upstairs and tie, blazer and cap downstairs; it felt anything but business as usual. I was terrified.

I lay in bed, wide-awake, for a long, long time, staring at the ceiling.

Thoughts going round and around in my head.

Above everything else, I was paranoid about one thing in particular. The fact that the School Rules stated, that following Games and PE lessons, all pupils would be required to take a shower.

I had never, up to that time, ever taken a shower, not even alone. The idea of being forced to strip off, and shower with a group of strangers, was something I simply could not reconcile myself to.

I drifted off, into a fitful sleep....

Although, for many reasons, the intended follow-on volumes will never be written, there are several parts of my then and later life which I feel the need to recount,

*Appendix 1*

I have already told, in the above pages, how I began to build things. Beginning with the somewhat illicit tale of the ‘Dairylea Projector,’ the ‘Frog’ model aeroplane kit, which I destroyed due to my ineptitude and the put-away red yacht, with my initials on the mainsail. What follows are some of the ways in which my interest in building and using such things never waned.

**The Weetabix Years.**

The producers of breakfast cereals weren’t stupid. They knew, then as now, that choices would mostly be made by the junior members of the family.

With the advent of self service shopping, out went the grocery list and in came pester-power.

I had already got a realistic, western six shooter, complete with plastic bullets, by collecting coupons from Kelloggs Cornflakes. The family were sick of cornflakes and so were relieved when Weetabix began to print, on the backs of their packets, the Weetabix Workshop series of vehicles.

These cut-out and glue models cost no more to produce than the regular pack-art; that was their genius. They began with all the most popular cars of the day.... I wanted all of them.

They began with an advertising campaign:



Cars began to pile up around my bedroom and, for what they were, they were excellent. My Mam didn’t mind either, there was no extra cost involved but Weetabix did get a bit samey, after a while.

*If you’d like to see more about the Weetabix Workshop series of models, please Google the following link:*

[*https://www.google.co.uk/search?hl=en&site=imghp&tbm=isch&source=hp&biw=1024&bih=647&q=Weetabix+Workshop+cutout+cars&oq=Weetabix+Workshop+cutout+cars&gs\_l=img.12...5282.5282.0.7369.1.1.0.0.0.0.258.258.2-1.1.0....0...1ac..64.img..0.0.0.UAsULAKpeGE*](https://www.google.co.uk/search?hl=en&site=imghp&tbm=isch&source=hp&biw=1024&bih=647&q=Weetabix+Workshop+cutout+cars&oq=Weetabix+Workshop+cutout+cars&gs_l=img.12...5282.5282.0.7369.1.1.0.0.0.0.258.258.2-1.1.0....0...1ac..64.img..0.0.0.UAsULAKpeGE)

With a bit of skill, you could actually print them out and build them today, should you have a mind to.

There was even a club to join:



As a member, I got newsletters with advanced notices of things to come. One day; ‘Whoa, what’s this?’



It seemed too good to be true; for just the coupons from 3 Family size or 6 Standard size Weetabix packs, plus a postal order for 3/6d (17.5p) I could get a real flying model, Auster aircraft worth almost twice that!

The Weetabix Wonderplane was mine as quickly as I could shove enough Weetabix down my neck – or anyone else’s for that matter. I also begged coupons from friends and family alike.

The contents of the box, when it arrived, looked very similar to those of the Frog model, which I had previously destroyed. What had changed in the interim was my dexterity. I still had much to learn, however.

All the parts were printed onto balsa sheets. They weren’t partly pre-pressed out, as the Frog kit had been, they needed to be cut. I asked my Dad what I should use and he loaned me a holder into which a Gillette razor blade could be inserted and used safely. At least, that was the plan. I had not yet been subjected to that unbreakable rule, of my future woodwork teacher, ‘Always keep your hands behind the cutting edge.’

During the cutting out process, using a school ruler as a straight-edge, I slipped and ran the razor blade down the full length of my left index finger.

The job was stopped, not just whilst my finger was treated but for about six months. The finger was re-dressed on a regular basis and kept in a leather finger stall. This last bit was a huge mistake.

Unable to breathe, the finger got badly infected. It turned into a yellow, puss-filled mess. I feared that I might lose it but eventually it did heal, albeit slightly shorter than its right hand partner.

Over time this dimensional inbalance faded away, as too did the scar.

My Weetabix Wonderplane was eventually completed and became my practical lesson in building all my model aeroplanes to come.



There were just two things wrong with it: absolutely everything except for the wheels needed to be made. Even the propeller and undercarriage had to be cut from a sheet of aluminium, with tin-snips. Also, more importantly, this was no lightweight!

Being made entirely from thick, sheet balsa, finished with sanding sealer and silver dope, it had the glide slope of a house-brick. All it could ever do was run around on the floor.

For it to have been capable of flight, using a rubber motor, it should have been built very lightly and covered in tissue paper. Had it survived and been fitted with a small engine and decent propeller, it might have flown very well. I’ll never know. It looked good though!

Eventually, whilst it *was* running around on the floor, one of my mother’s catalogues fell on it. Splat! So that was the extent of my modelling connection with Weetabix. The model building didn’t stop there though.

I had to be content to continue going down to Civic Centre Fields, to watch the growing model club there. That is, until school pal David Millet produced a model of his own. His Keil Kraft Senator actually flew. Flew so well, in fact, that we last saw it sitting in the top of a tree on Tetbury Fields.

He had built it in conjunction with his father, a commercial artist. Dave’s dad also had a model of his own. A huge, red Piper Cub, with yellow registration and detailing, it was fitted with radio control and a big engine. Sadly, as a labour of love, it had never been entrusted to the air. I do not know if it was ever flown.

For a while, we turned our attention to boats. By now the quartet of myself, Dave Millet, Robert Norton and Jim Cook was well established. Down to Lees Model Shop, in Gatley, went Robert Norton who purchased a Keil Kraft Triton model boat kit. Not long afterwards we accompanied him to Wilmslow for its maiden voyage on Lindow Common lake.

The EeZeBILT range of model boat kits began with four very small examples which could be easily carried on the back of a bicycle.



They all resembled full sized boats, admittedly quite badly, but were easy to make and sail. The small electric motor was connected to the prop shaft with a length of cycle valve rubber and powered by a 4.5 volt flat torch battery.

Rapidly after seeing Robert’s model sail, we all followed suit. I had the Neptune cabin cruiser. While at Wilmslow, we also got to mix with a bunch of more serious modellers. Some had very large boats, often with radio control.

I went on to build very many model boats and aircraft and, initially, my own radio control systems too.

Sadly, these hobbies are now being denied to many due to the restrictions on waters to sail upon and fields to fly from.

Many public lakes, which I used in the past, are now banned to model boaters. Heaton Park, Bolton, Wigan and Lindow Common are all now classified as nature reserves. The latter now has an ugly fence, topped with barbed wire, around it. This, to stop both unauthorised use and to prevent children falling in, apparently!

Still, who today would want to build, sail or fly models, when they can stay indoors and play on a video game?